

Edited by  
Felicity Rash & Christophe Declercq

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*The* **GREAT WAR**  
*in* **BELGIUM** *and*  
*the* **NETHERLANDS**

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Beyond Flanders Fields



# The Great War in Belgium and the Netherlands

Felicity Rash • Christophe Declercq  
Editors

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*Editors*

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Cover illustration: Boat bridge, flood zone in Flanders, Belgium, from *Illustrazione Italiana*, Year XLI, No 51, December 13, 1914 © De Agostini / Biblioteca Ambrosiana

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**Fig. 1** A Frog he would to Belgium go

A frog he would to Belgium go,  
 Heigho, says Rowley!  
 Whether his treaty would let him or no,  
 With his Rowley, Powley, Gammon and Spying,  
 Hoch! says Attila Rowley.  
 On Paris he started to make an attack,  
 Heigho, says Rowley!  
 But some Tommies in Khaki soon bundled him back  
 With his Rowley, Powley, Gammon and Spying,  
 Hoch! says Attila Rowley.

Elphinstone Thorpe and G.A.Stevens (1915), *Nursery Rhymes for Fighting Times*. This poem is a pastiche of the traditional English rhyme *A Frog he would A-wooing go*.

## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This volume was inspired by a workshop, *Beyond Flanders Fields*, which took place at Queen Mary, University of London, on 4th–5th June, 2016. The aim of the workshop was to expand the field of First World War Studies about Belgium’s role beyond military matters and beyond the front line, and to offer a platform from which the interdisciplinary and international nature of First World War scholarship could be extended. The resulting volume documents intellectual and artistic responses to the German occupation of Belgium as well as the sociocultural context within which Allied nations offered assistance to beleaguered Belgium. The relationship between the Low Countries also plays a role, as do discussions of what should happen to Belgium after the war. The volume ends with a chapter on present-day memorialization.

In an introductory chapter, “When Neutrality Cannot Protect Against Belligerence”, Felicity Rash describes the neutralization of Belgium and Luxembourg prior to the First World War and the German occupation of those nations between August 2nd and 4th, 1914. Rash details British and American interpretations of the term “neutrality” within the context of Belgium’s position at the start of the war and examines the roles and attitudes adopted by British aid workers who travelled to Belgium during the first few weeks of the war.

In Chap. 2, Sophie de Schaepdrijver examines the concept of “war culture” as a set of beliefs that allowed the Belgians to countenance war as a necessary reality. One of this chapter’s major contributions is her account of *King Albert’s Book*, published by the *Daily Telegraph* for Christmas 1914, in which the “sacrifice” of Belgium was eulogized and Belgium’s

status as a martyred nation established. De Schaepdrijver assesses the widespread need to see the Belgian cause as a “sacrifice for the greater good” as a myth, and sees the reality of Belgium’s stance as lying in its need to comply with international law and thus secure its long-term security.

John Williams’s chapter, “The Flames of Louvain”, identifies the motives of German occupying forces for destroying the culturally rich university town of Leuven/Louvain during the first weeks of the war. He discusses reactions to the sacking from “Beyond Flanders Fields”, not only on the part of the Entente but on the part of German academics, politicians and the general public. In this sense it lays the foundation for Sebastian Bischoff’s chapter on German stereotypes of the Belgians. Bischoff’s chapter, “Furies, Spies and Fallen Women”, makes a connection between gender as represented in German public discourse and its role in framing war propaganda during the First World War. While Belgium was portrayed as a female trophy for Germany, sexualized and sadistic images of Belgian women were used to emphasize the role of the purportedly civilized and chivalrous German men who were fighting for the safety and honour of the female population of their homeland.

In her chapter on the German “*Flamenpolitik*”, Tessa Lobbes examines the role of the neutral Netherlands in the Belgian language conflict, mainly during the period 1915–1916, when the Dutch had become aware of German and Dutch support for Flemish nationalist activism, causing Germany in particular to look upon race and language as elements of cohesion. Interaction between Dutch, Belgian and belligerent intellectuals and officials as a response to the *Flamenpolitik* led to three types of alliance: one pro-German, one pro-French and a third that was simultaneously pro-Belgian and pro-Flemish.

Geneviève Warland’s chapter on the “Belgian question” looks at Germany’s post-war plans for Belgium, in particular from the point of view of German academics. Intellectuals were concerned with the legitimacy of Belgian statehood and nationhood, and made plans for Belgium’s role in a new post-war Europe dominated by the German Empire.

In a chapter on “The Belgian Exile Press” Christophe Declercq examines core elements of the history of Belgian refugees in Britain during the First World War through their representation in Belgian exile newspapers published in Britain. The Belgian journals allowed for an increased sense of Belgian identity in exile but also extended existing language relations within the Belgian community.



Maria Inés Tato's chapter on the diaries of Roberto J. Payró, written during the early months of the German occupation of Brussels (August–November 1914), documents the Argentinian journalist's dismay at the restrictions imposed upon both the people and communication systems within Belgium. As foreign correspondent to the Argentinian newspaper *La Nación*, Payró worried about the reliability of news that reached the outside world. He was also concerned about the spread of rumours among the civilian population of Brussels. The extensive quotations included in this chapter, which have been translated into English by the author, have been provided in their original Spanish due to the nature of their rhetoric and the significance for this particular chapter, not only of *what* is said but *how* it is said.

Hugh Dunthorne's chapter on Frank Brangwyn illustrates the versatility which set this artist apart from many of his contemporaries. His realism made his work especially effective for posters and publications encouraging recruitment and promoting war charities. Brangwyn's refusal to idealize the fighting forces and to ignore the horrors of war underpinned his activism during the First World War, one of his chief achievements being the practical and financial support of Belgian refugee artists.

Hubert van Tuyll's chapter, "The Low Countries as Enemies, 1918–1920", uses primary source material from the Belgian and Dutch Foreign Ministry and State Archives to examine the post-war relationship of Belgium and the Netherlands and the reasons for a lack of strategic cooperation between the countries directly after the Versailles Treaty.

The final chapter to this volume highlights the importance of memorialization. In this chapter, Karen Shelby recounts the history of the *Wacht aan de IJzer* (The Guard on the IJzer), which determined the boundaries of the Belgian Front during the First World War, and looks at the role of the Westfront Nieuwpoort Visitors' Centre, with its famous facsimile of a section of the *Panorama of the IJzer 1914* by Alfred Bastien, illustrating the devastation in Flanders.

The editors would like to acknowledge their gratitude toward the following institutions and individuals. The initial workshop was enabled in both financial and practical terms by Queen Mary University of London. We are particularly indebted to Professor Simon Gaskell, Professor Adrian Armstrong, Nicola Lee and Beth Prescott for their support.

The editors would like to extend their gratitude to the Belgian Embassy—to Mr. and Mrs. Trouveroy, and Tine Jacobs in particular—for hosting a wonderful drink on the eve of the conference. We are equally



indebted to Flanders House, London—Lukas Van Damme in particular—for their support and their kind offering of the conference dinner.

Finally, the editors would like to thank the contributors to the volume but also the delegates of the workshop for making *Beyond Flanders Fields* such an interesting event and volume.

Felicity Rash  
Christophe Declercq

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## CHAPTER 1

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# When Neutrality Cannot Protect Against Belligerence: The Position of the Low Countries Seen from Beyond Flanders Fields

*Felicity Rash*

Belgium's geographical position as a buffer between antagonistic European nations during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries made it a political "flashpoint" on the European stage (Marks 2014: 107). It therefore suited the European Great Powers to support its creation in 1830 and subsequently maintain and defend it as a militarily neutral region. This was a matter of concern for Great Britain in particular, since any Great Power who possessed Belgium, and prior to its creation the Netherlands too (Keefer 2011: 18, 67), would have easy access to the British coastline. As commercial and colonialist rivalry grew between Britain and Germany, and tensions between France and Germany over the ownership of Rhineland territories continued, Belgium's barrier position gained in importance. Luxembourg had similar geographical significance for the Great Powers. Being at the forefront of industrialization and railway infrastructure on the continent, the economic prowess of the small buffer state

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grew in desirability. Instrumental in its growth were Anglo-Belgian connections. The first railway connection in the world outside Britain, created ten years after the Stockton-Darlington line opened, ran between Mechelen and Brussels. Prior to the existence of Belgium, the British entrepreneur John Cockerill had established an industrial conglomerate, and by 1850 had contributed substantially to turning Belgium into the one of the largest economic powers in the world (Kaiser and Schot 2014: 182; Declercq 2015: 66).

## 1 THE NEUTRALIZATION OF BELGIUM AND LUXEMBOURG

With the French occupying Belgium from 1795 onwards, the British feared that Napoleon would use the Scheldt estuary to effectuate an attack if not outright invasion of Britain (Jorgensen 1999: 51). In 1814 several near-conspiratorial protocols (Treaty of Chaumont, the First Treaty of Paris and the Eight Articles of London) provisionally awarded the territory of Belgium to the Kingdom of the Netherlands (Barrow 1832: 3197).<sup>1</sup> Following Napoleon's final defeat at Waterloo in 1815, Belgium ceased to be controlled by France and was attached to the United Kingdom of the Netherlands under King William I. In 1830, however, Belgium rebelled against its autocratic Dutch ruler and declared independence. Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, the widower of Charlotte of Wales, was established as the first King of the Belgians in 1831. However, the sovereignty of Belgium remained a matter of international concern. Following prolonged diplomatic negotiations and an initial unwillingness on the part of the Netherlands to cooperate, the First Treaty of London (1830) was eventually signed in 1839 by Great Britain, France, Prussia, the Austrian Empire and Russia. According to Article 7 of the Treaty, the Kingdom of Belgium became an "independent and perpetually neutral State" (Sanger and Norton 1915: 139–141). The United Kingdom of the Netherlands and Luxembourg were recognized as independent and neutral states, but Luxembourg lost its French-speaking territories to Belgium. Like Belgium, Luxembourg was situated at a strategic gateway position between France and Lower Germany, forming a vital section of a potential invasion route between Paris and Berlin. The Duchy was thus, like Belgium, of considerable significance to the Great Powers.

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg had originally been a province with loyalties that tended towards Belgium rather than Germany. Its Grand Duke was, however, the King of Holland until 1866; it was thus part of the

German Confederacy and housed a Prussian garrison (MacBean Knight 1914: 143). From the French and Prussian point of view, both desired to annex Luxembourg along with Belgium, and the Great Powers intervened in 1867, guaranteeing continued neutrality for Luxembourg and removing the Prussian garrison from its capital, although the Grand Duchy remained joined to Germany for tariff and customs purposes (*ibid.*, 144).

In the later nineteenth century, Napoleon III wanted to absorb Belgium into France, and his plans were one of the major causes of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71. Britain signed treaties with both France and Prussia at this point, committing to protect Belgian independence and preserving its buffer status. Despite further claims being made upon Luxembourg by Prussia, the Grand Duchy was able to remain neutral and was still so in 1914.

## 2 THE INVASION OF LUXEMBOURG AND BELGIUM IN 1914

A German assault upon Belgium might not, in fact, have been totally unexpected by Leopold II, who had been offered an alliance by Emperor Wilhelm II in 1904. Predicting a war with France at the time, the kaiser proposed that Belgium join forces with Germany: in return it would receive new territories in northern France. When Leopold rejected this bait, Wilhelm threatened that he might nevertheless be forced to proceed “on purely strategic principles” (Clark 2013: 181). In 1913, Leopold’s successor, King Albert I—who had succeeded Leopold II in 1909—also visited Wilhelm II, worried at the number of new German railway lines leading to the Belgian border. Wilhelm once more referred to the likelihood of a war with France, citing French bellicosity as a reason; once more he offered Belgium the opportunity to side with Germany or risk losing its independence. Albert resolved, however, that Belgians should defend their territory at all costs (Marks 2014: 112).

The Belgian refusal to dance to the German tune meant that the Schlieffen Plan for a six-week offensive against France would be put into effect. The plan was for a German attack upon the western flank of the French army in order to drive it towards German and Swiss territory on its eastern flank, and so enclose it. For this to be possible, German troops would have to cross neutral Belgium and Luxembourg. As a neutral state and under the terms of the Hague Convention of 1910, Belgium was pre-

vented from allowing the army of one nation to cross its territory in order to attack another. This agreement had been ratified by both Germany and Belgium (Sobich and Bischoff 2015: 193). For Belgium to disregard its responsibility in this respect would de facto have meant that it had taken Germany's side in an act of war and put it on a war footing with France.

German troops occupied Luxembourg on 2nd August 1914, and awaited permission to continue into Belgium. Germany issued an ultimatum to Belgium on the evening of the same day—delivered by von Below Saleske, the German ambassador in Brussels, to Julien Davignon, the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs—offering it a choice between independence as a German ally and being considered an enemy (*German Ultimatum* 1914). In a clear refusal to grant free passage, issued the next day, Belgium chose war. For King Albert, his government and his nation it was a matter of national honour and duty towards Europe to stand up for their own independence and for international security (Clark 2013: 550). Germany declared war upon France on August 3rd and invaded Belgium, east of Liège, the next morning.

By that time, Britain had already issued an ultimatum to Germany to refrain from hostilities in Belgium. The message from the British government was conveyed by the British Ambassador, Edward Goschen, to the German Chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, who dismissed it with the statement that he could not believe Britain would threaten war because of a mere word, “neutrality”, upon a “scrap of paper” (*German Fetzen Papier*).<sup>2</sup> He was referring to the 1839 Treaty of London. Since no official answer to the British warning was received by the deadline of midnight of 4th August, Britain declared war upon Germany. Belgium requested military support from Britain on 5th August. The British Expeditionary Force was initially sent to support the French and linked with the French army at Maubeuge on the Belgian border, from where they entered Belgium.

Having expected a quick and trouble-free march through Belgium, German soldiers were confronted with strong resistance, and Liège only fell after a long and brutal siege, on 18th August. Still, the German plan to arrive in France within three days was delayed by only three weeks. Most of the Belgian army retreated north, to the fortified port of Antwerp on the River Scheldt, whereas German troops ransacked many villages and towns, killing hundreds of civilians along the way. The sacking of the university town of Louvain echoed across the globe. German soldiers reached Brussels on 20th August, and Namur and Charleroi three days later, where

they faced the French army. On 23rd and 24th August, the Germans confronted the British near Mons. However, the British and French troops were no match for the Germans and retreated on 24th August well into French territory. Antwerp was taken by the Germans on 9th October, 1914, marking the beginning of the end of the moving front, which settled with the Fall of Ostend on 15th October and the First Battle of Ypres, starting 16th October. Belgium merely retained control of a small strip of territory behind the River Yser near the French border.

### 3 SOME CONTEMPORARY VIEWS ON THE MEANING OF “NEUTRALITY”

When examining Belgian neutrality and the British self-image as Belgium’s self-appointed saviour, it is interesting to look at the issues from an American perspective. John William Burgess, Professor of International and Constitutional Law at Columbia University, wrote in 1915 on the question of whether Belgian neutrality was a “guaranteed” neutrality or an “ordinary” neutrality “enjoyed by all states not at war, when some states are at war”. He explained that the difference between ordinary neutrality and guaranteed neutrality was “that no state is under any obligation to defend the ordinary neutrality of any other state against the infringement by a belligerent, and no belligerent is under any specific obligation to observe it” (Burgess 1915: 167 f.). Guaranteed neutrality, on the other hand, was a question of agreement between particular states, and Burgess considered it doubtful that in August 1914 Belgium possessed “any other kind of neutrality than ordinary neutrality” (*ibid.*, 171 f.). According to Burgess, Britain, while being the power most interested in preserving Belgian neutrality, procured agreements with France and the North German Union to guarantee this neutrality during the Franco-Prussian War, but these treaties expired in 1872. The German Empire, when founded in 1871, signed no treaty guaranteeing Belgian neutrality and, Burgess felt, was justified in considering Belgium to have grown into a prosperous and well-fortified world power, with extensive colonies, and no specific right to claim anything other than “ordinary” neutrality (*ibid.*, 171). Burgess in fact blamed Britain for encouraging Belgium to resist the German march through Belgium en route to France: Britain had in this way declared belligerent intent when it could have remained neutral in a war between the North German Union and France (*ibid.*, 175). When Sir



Edward Grey had expressed British expectations, through his envoy to the Belgian government, that Belgium should not allow the passage of German troops, this had been “one of the most inconsiderate, reckless, and selfish acts ever committed by a great power” (ibid., 176). Belgium could, according to Burgess, thank Britain for “every drop of blood shed by her people”; indeed, Britain was “not thinking so much of protecting Belgium as of Belgium protecting her” (ibid., 176 f.).

The British assessment of the situation in which both Belgium and Luxembourg found themselves was that as “neutralized” nations they were to be considered permanently neutral according to the principal “once neutralised, always neutralised” (MacBean Knight 1914: 142). MacBean Knight explains that neutralization differs from neutrality in that “the latter is a spontaneous attitude of a State which is assumed independently of the consent of any other State”, whereas neutralization has to be agreed by treaty “among the Great Powers” (ibid.). The author here assumes that such a treaty of neutralization, and one including German consent, existed for both Belgium and Luxembourg, its purpose being to create “buffer” states. He states that Belgium has only found it necessary to arm itself for self-defence (ibid., 142). MacBean Knight further proposes that Belgium has a strong unified national spirit, a national “soul”, and that the Walloons and the Flemings, “two races of people, fundamentally different from one another in every respect, and, before the war (...) bitterly opposed to one another in every direction”, are now prepared to fight together in the face of Pan-Germanism (ibid., 153). For MacBean Knight, the war has shown that “racial unity is not necessary to national unity” (ibid., 154). Furthermore, both Walloons and Flemings display equal courage and determination, the only difference being that Walloons “season these with a little humour and some obvious sentiment and passion” (ibid., 153).<sup>3</sup>

#### 4 ASSISTANCE FROM OUTSIDE

The image of “Poor Little Belgium”<sup>4</sup> became a mainstay of Allied propaganda throughout the Great War. The British in particular were united in their sympathy and moral outrage. The rallying cries for military and civilian assistance also helped support a British image of itself as the caring saviour of a vulnerable friend. Belgium was depicted as a helpless victim in recruitment posters and propagandistic artwork. The Dutch artist Louis Raemaekers is particularly renowned for having flouted German

censorship with his wartime cartoons, published in the Amsterdam newspaper, *De Telegraaf*. He settled in Britain in 1915 and continued to publish in the *Daily Mail*. Raemaekers commonly depicted Kaiser Wilhelm II as an ally of Satan and German *Kultur* as a rapist or a seducer. In the following image, *The Promise*, Britannia is portrayed as Belgium's saviour (Fig. 1.1):

We shall never sheathe the sword which we have not lightly drawn until Belgium recovers in full measure all or more than she has sacrificed, until France is adequately secured against the menace of aggression, until the rights of the smaller nationalities of Europe are placed upon an unassailable foundation, and until the military domination of Prussia is wholly and finally destroyed. H.H. ASQUITH, *Prime Minister of England*, November 1914. (Parrott 1917: 3; see also J. Murray Allison 1918)<sup>5</sup>

**Fig. 1.1** The Promise



British medical and ambulance teams started to arrive in Belgium in September 1914, rescuing and treating soldiers and civilians from both the front line and ruined settlements. Hector Munro's Motor Ambulance Corps (MAC)<sup>6</sup> arrived in Ghent on 26<sup>th</sup> September 1914, by which time German forces had control of most of south-eastern Belgium and were advancing towards the north and west. They began a bombardment of Antwerp on 28th September and it fell on 10th October. Henry Sessions Souttar (1875–1964), Surgeon-in-Chief to the Belgian Field Hospital at Antwerp, wrote about his experiences in Belgium during September and October 1914 and published his memoir in 1915.

Such first-hand accounts painted a picture of a humble yet stoical and good-humoured population of a violated and weak nation. Henry Souttar saw Belgium as standing fast in order to protect the rest of Europe, as a nation which “preferring death to dishonour, has in all likelihood saved both France and ourselves from sharing its terrible but glorious fate” (Souttar 1915: 31). While Souttar's major motivation for travelling to Belgium was clearly altruistic, he also saw the experience in terms of professional gain. The hospital was an ideal place for him “to study the effects of rifle and shell fire” (*ibid.*, 10) due to the seriousness of the injuries and the number of injured. A visit from Marie Curie to his endeavours in Veurne/Furnes in December 1914 and the opportunity to try out new radiographic techniques was as significant to Souttar as his satisfaction at helping the wounded.

May Sinclair is another example of a helper with a personal agenda and her reasons for joining Munro's Ambulance Corps to Belgium were largely selfish.<sup>7</sup> As a woman born in 1863 she had been denied opportunities open to men; Sinclair saw the war as a belated opportunity to enjoy new and intense experiences and achieve personal validation (Raitt 2000: 150). Sinclair arrived in Ghent with the Motor Ambulance Corps on 26th September. She sought what she described as the “greatest possible danger” for herself, and Belgium became her vehicle. She expressed the hope that there would be a second Waterloo, accompanied by all that the name evoked (Sinclair 1915: 94). When Belgium gave her what she was seeking, Sinclair felt “sheer excitement” at the “joyous adventure” (Sinclair 1915: 152). Although rarely able to make herself useful at the field hospital she was on one occasion allowed out to the front line and given a severely wounded Flemish soldier to nurse: he became “my Flamand”, her “find”, and the object of her own self-realization:

He was a Flamand, clumsily built; he had a broad, rather ugly face, narrowing suddenly as the fringe of his whiskers became a little straggling beard. But to me he was the most beautiful thing I have ever seen. And I loved him. I do not think it is possible to love, to adore any creature more than I loved and adored that clumsy, ugly Flamand. He was my first wounded man. (Sinclair 1915: 170f.)

Sinclair was sent back the Britain on 13th October, ostensibly to fetch funds. It is not certain why she was not allowed to return to Belgium, but it is clear from her memoir that she was not qualified to be of much practical use to the MAC and her presence might well have been detrimental.<sup>8</sup>

## 5 CONCLUSION

Belgium's role in European history, not only during the First World War but in the century preceding it, has been one of a strategic buffer between more powerful, often arguing, nations. Political neutrality has not always worked in its favour. The same can be said of Luxembourg and the Netherlands, but it is Belgium whose legacy is the most remarkable. The image of "Poor Little Belgium" has entered history in discursive and visual traces, and can still be invoked as a symbol of injustice and victimhood. Throughout the First World War, Belgium became, moreover, not only the victim of an invading enemy, but the recipient of a type of assistance which was not always purely altruistic in its motivation, showing that pity can benefit the giver as well as the receiver.

## NOTES

1. Most of the territory that is now occupied by the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxemburg had been already been united as the Seventeen Provinces in the sixteenth century.
2. German *Fetzen*, translatable as "rag" or "scrap", bears negative connotations and suggests an inherent worthlessness. Its use could also be seen as representing a more dismissive attitude than might be attached to English "scrap" or the usual translation into French, *chiffon*.
3. For further appreciation of semantic shifts in the use of and denotations in the usage of "Flemish", "Fleming", and "Dutch" in the context of Flanders, see Amory (2014: 246 ff.) and Declercq (2016: 159 ff.).
4. The phrase "Poor Little Belgium" most likely first appeared in local British press. After it occurred in both *The Cheltenham Looker-On* and the *Gloucester*

- Journal* on August 15th, it became the heading for an article in the *Newcastle Journal* on September 3rd (British Library Newspaper Archive). In fact, the phrase “Gallant Little Belgium” predates this with a first occurrence in the *Western Morning News* on August 7th.
5. This cartoon was also published on collectable cigarette cards.
  6. Hector Munro, a director of the London Medico-Psychological Clinic, founded the Munro Ambulance Corps under the auspices of the Belgian Red Cross in August 1914.
  7. May Sinclair was a co-founder of Munro’s clinic and it has been claimed that the Ambulance Corps was her idea (Raitt 2000: 155). Sinclair arrived in Ghent with the Motor Ambulance Corps on September 26th. She left Belgium on October 13th, ostensibly to fetch funds. She was not allowed to return, possibly due to her having been deemed unsuited to her desired role.
  8. Another memoir was published in 1917 by Elsie Knocker and Mairi Chisholm, two dispatch riders for the Women’s Emergency Corps who became part of the Flying Ambulance Corps in Belgium (Mitton 1917).

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# “A Less-Than-Total Total War”: Neutrality, Invasion, and the Stakes of War, 1914–1918

*Sophie De Schaepdrijver*

## 1 1914: “NATIONAL DEFENCE”

War broke out in Europe in August 1914 and with it, a willingness to accept war. To this day, historians try to grasp the exact nature of this willingness. What we do know is that it was not a collective frenzy; for all of the photographs of cheering urban crowds, actual war enthusiasm was rare. Far more widespread was a kind of worried resolve, an acceptance of war as “duty”—a duty defined as defence of the nation, its territory and presumed values, and even of general “civilized” values allegedly threatened by the enemy. In a matter of days, this emphasis on defence overshadowed earlier views of the looming war as a random disaster.

Why this emphasis on defence? Because the fronts—or what would become known as “fronts” once armies let go of long-held beliefs in mobile warfare—were formed by invasions. The German armies’ invasions

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on the Western Front, and the tsarist, Austro-Hungarian, German, and Bulgarian incursions back and forth in the East. Belligerents were armed to the teeth, even the small state of Serbia, which had a population of no more than 1.8 million but mobilized virtually all of its able-bodied army-aged men.

## 2 THE INVASION OF BELGIUM

The invasion of Belgium involved a less militarized state than others, and was of a different order overall. When Otto von Emmich's Army of the Meuse crossed into Belgian territory on 4th August 1914, it violated international law, because Belgium was a neutral state. In 1839, the states comprising the so-called Concert of Europe (the German confederation, led by Prussia, France, Great Britain, Russia, Austria, the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, and the Kingdom of Belgium) had signed an agreement that none should attack the new Belgian kingdom—now internationally recognized—and all committed to defend it. This Treaty of London was less a matter of high principle than a pragmatic answer to the question of how the new kingdom, which occupied such a crucial strategic position, could be slotted into the balance of power in Europe. Yet the neutrality of Belgium had over the decades grown into a cornerstone of international law; and as the historian Isabel Hull has pointed out, grasping what was at stake in the First World War means acknowledging that international law genuinely mattered to contemporaries, even if they differed over how to interpret it (Hull 2014: 17). It was a cornerstone, because the unassailability of Belgium hinged on a wider principle: that even a small, only lightly militarized and difficult-to-defend land in a strategically crucial corner of the continent had the right to independent existence. The neutrality of Belgium underscored a central tenet of international relations, namely that pursuing hegemony on the European continent was not an accepted foreign policy (*ibid.*).

Belgian neutrality was hardly a high-flown idealistic principle meant to abolish war. But it was meant to impose limits on the range of military power—limits that were in the interest of small states. All of this means that, when the German armies crossed into Belgium on the morning of August 4th, 1914, they did not just cross a frontier; they engaged in an act of war that overstepped international norms. The German leadership acknowledged as much. No sooner had the German forces reached Liège than Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, in a speech before the

Reichstag, conceded that the violation of Belgian neutrality transgressed international law. He claimed that this was a justified transgression, because, as the Chancellor argued, Germany was fighting for its very survival—but it was a transgression nonetheless.

Before long, influenced by German conservative opinion (army command, the heavy-industry lobby, East Elbian landowners), the Chancellor had to retract even this admission, and henceforth the official narrative held that Belgium had never actually been neutral. But that change of rhetorical strategy happened later. In those first days of the conflict, the German government still adhered to the general conviction that attacking a neutral state was prohibited.

Among the Allies, as could be expected, the German Empire’s violation of Belgium’s neutrality was a major issue. In Britain, especially, the invasion of a small and neutral country by a “Great Power” made it possible to assign moral purpose to a baffling conflict in which national interests were not immediately at stake. While it is true that the entry into war was already decided upon by much of the British leadership, the invasion of Belgium generated a quite genuine sense of indignation among the British public.<sup>1</sup> The writer and suffragist Mary Stocks (1891–1975), for one, would later recall that the general

revulsion of feeling on learning of the Belgian invasion (...) brought [us all] into wholehearted support of the war effort. [It] (...) was seen as a monstrous, wicked, unprovoked act of aggression against a small neutral country which we were honour bound to assist.

(Marrow 1999: 25)

In France, outrage over the Belgian invasion merged with the horror at the invasion of its own national territory, and neutral states took the opportunity to highlight their resolve to defend their neutral status. Here, too, the notion of armed national defence was placed front and centre.

All in all, if we define as “war culture” the set of beliefs that allowed populations to countenance war, Belgium became a trope in an emerging war culture.<sup>2</sup> The conflict was cast as a crusade and its staggering human toll as “sacrifice.” Belgium was eulogized as a martyred nation which had “sacrificed itself” to the cause of justice. The country owed its martyr status to the specific circumstances of its entry into the war. On 2nd August, the Belgian government had rejected an ultimatum from Berlin demanding free passage westward for the German armies on pain of war, since

granting passage would constitute a violation of the nation's neutrality. The rejection letter stated that in accepting this proposal:

(...) the Belgian government would sacrifice the honour of the nation and its duty towards Europe. (...) The Belgian government firmly intends to resist all intrusion upon its rights by all means in its power. (de Ridder 1922: 134f.; trans. De Schaepdrijver)

Belgium's government, then, in choosing to uphold neutrality, accepted war. Available sources suggest that this momentous decision was by and large endorsed by the Belgian public, in spite of—or maybe precisely because of—widespread expectations that neutrality would ultimately save the country from being attacked. At any rate, the shock of sudden war merged with indignation at those who forced the country into the conflict.

The Belgian government's response caused considerable surprise internationally: the British and French (as well as German) leadership had expected little Belgian resistance in the event of a German invasion (Stengers 1995). The unanticipated decision to resist met with much applause; it was hailed in Britain, France, and even Russia as a principled stand in favour of international agreements, and, by extension, of the rule of law itself. In London, on 27th August, 1914, Prime Minister Asquith stated before Parliament that:

The Belgians have won for themselves the immortal glory which belongs to a people who prefer freedom to ease, to security, even to life itself. (...) We are with them heart and soul, because, by their side and in their company, we are defending at the same time two great causes—the independence of small States and the sanctity of international covenants.<sup>3</sup>

On that same day, survivors of a civilian massacre were marched into Brussels under the jeers of their captors. These were people from Louvain (Leuven), a badly battered university town, which in Allied discourse was now elevated into a symbol of civilization itself. What came to be known as the “German Atrocities” propelled Belgium to the forefront of British war reporting (Gregory 2004: 29). The suffering of Belgian civilians thus consecrated Belgium's international status as an emblem of sacrifice for the common good (De Schaepdrijver 1999: 267–294).

One particularly coherent expression of this discursive elevation appeared at Christmas 1914. It was a mass-distributed illustrated

compendium of statements of gratitude, entitled *King Albert's Book: A Tribute to the Belgian King and People from Representative Men and Women Throughout the World*,<sup>4</sup> published by the *Daily Telegraph*—the establishment “quality” newspaper—as a charity effort for Belgian refugees. *King Albert's Book* comprised 239 entries—statements, poems, artworks, and musical scores—by an array of luminaries including statesmen (such as Winston Churchill, and the former U.S. President William Taft) and imperial dignitaries (such as the Aga Khan), ambassadors, philanthropists, church authorities and other public figures (including the women's suffrage activists Emmeline Pankhurst and Millicent Fawcett).<sup>5</sup> Other contributors included Claude Monet, Claude Debussy and Sarah Bernhardt, and the novelists Edith Wharton, Thomas Hardy and Paul Bourget; also poets, playwrights, journalists, and social scientists, such as Henri Bergson and Sidney Webb. Two-thirds of the contributions—153 to be precise—came from Britain and its dominions; among the 86 others, 24 were French and 6 Russian, the others hailing from neutral (or at that time still neutral) countries, including 23 Americans, 10 Italians, 8 Scandinavians, 6 Spanish and three Dutch (including the authors Frederik Van Eeden and Louis Couperus).<sup>6</sup> In different voices, but with similar emphases, this self-referentially prestigious chorus placed “Belgium's sacrifice” within a grand historical narrative. Belgium's stand on behalf of the rule of law—“one of the golden pages of the world's story”, wrote the Archbishop of Canterbury (*King Albert's Book*: 16)—was defined as a strike for civilisation and progress against the reactionary forces presently embodied by Germany's “civilised barbarism” (*King Albert's Book*: 150).<sup>7</sup> Belgium's putative willingness to serve as a rampart against darker forces, even as these threatened to engulf it, was all the more admirable given its size. “It has been the privilege of little nations at different points in the history of the world to render some signal service to civilisation”, wrote David Lloyd George, adding:

That duty Belgium has now been called upon to render to European civilisation, and nobly has she answered the call. It is her heroism that has forced Prussian Junkerdom, its character, and its designs, into the light of day (...); to assail Belgium it had to come into the open, where its arrogance, its brutality, and its aggressiveness became manifest to the world. It was Belgian valour that exposed the sinister character of Prussian militarism, and when that menace is finally overthrown the most honourable share in the triumph will be due to Belgian sacrifice. (*King Albert's Book*: 32)<sup>8</sup>

Rabbi Joseph Hertz, head of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Empire, placed Belgium within a historic line of small heroic nations:

Only that nation can be called cultured (...) which by its living, and, if need be, by its dying, vindicates the eternal values of life—conscience, honour, liberty. Judged by this test, two of the littlest of peoples, Judaea in ancient times and Belgium to-day, and not their mighty and ruthless oppressors, are among the chief defenders of culture, champions of the sacred heritage of man. (*King Albert's Book*: 70)

This kind of high-flown rhetoric would become something of an embarrassment after the war. It could be argued that for all its occasional cant, the “Gallant Little Belgium” rhetoric of 1914–1915 was less a calculated manipulation of public opinion than a political myth: it corresponded to an urgent need to identify tangible instances of “sacrifice” for the sake of law and progress, a principle which—for better or worse—entire Victorian, Edwardian, and Third Republic generations had been raised to embrace.<sup>9</sup> One could even hail the Belgian cause without endorsing war per se. Romain Rolland, who had by then made his name as the war’s most eloquent sceptic, sent a lengthy statement to the editors of *King Albert's Book*, comparing Belgium’s defensive stand to the legendary ancient battle of Thermopylae,<sup>10</sup> and asserting that:

The heroism of this people who, without a murmur, sacrificed everything for honour, burst like a thunderclap upon us at a time when the spirit of victorious Germany was offering to the world a conception of political realism, resting solidly on force and self-interest. It was the liberation of the oppressed idealism of the West. And it seemed a miracle that the signal should have been given by this little nation. (*King Albert's Book*: 107f.; trans. De Schaepdrijver)

The miraculous nature of Belgium’s stand was only apparent, however: “Small in space and numbers, she is one of the greatest nations in Europe in her abounding vitality” (ibid.). Rolland’s paeans to Belgian “vitality” expressed his era’s preoccupation with questions of energy and “vitalism”, the term coined by the French philosopher Bergson, whose own statement to *King Albert's Book* testified, like Rolland’s, to a sense of liberation from cultural pessimism:

I have said and I have thought for long that history was a school of immorality. I shall say so no more, after the example that Belgium has just given to

the world. A deed like this redeems the worst meanness of mankind. It makes one feel more proud of being a man. (*King Albert's Book*: 59; trans. De Schaepdrijver)

To summarize, the Belgian cause, in the first months of the war, spoke to contemporaries' need to believe in the real-life existence of higher striving, of sacrifice for the greater good, and therefore in the possibility of unity. It was myth, not manipulation.

Still it *was* myth—a conceit, a stylization, a fond belief. Courageous though the Belgian rejection of the German ultimatum had been, the government had hardly intended Belgium to become “The Nation that Died for Europe” (Chesterton 1915: 129 f.).<sup>11</sup> Considerations of national honour had certainly played a role in the rejection, and in the citizenry's approval of it; there was also genuine indignation over the German Empire's breach of an international contract and over its assumption that the leadership of the small neighbouring state would simply give in. And most citizens realized a terrible struggle would ensue.

The rejection of the ultimatum was, however, equally inspired by considerations of long-term safety: only international agreements could safeguard the independence of a small state. Compliance with international law was a measure of security in the long term. The government had chosen to take a serious but calculated risk in mounting a very vigorous defence while counting on swift assistance from Entente forces. But no one had suggested self-immolation. And yet *King Albert's Book* and other expressions of war discourse linked the Belgian government's decision to defend neutrality to the ensuing tragedies. The German advance into Belgium, the great loss of Belgian troops, the enormous material destructions, mass flight, civilian massacres, military occupation—all were, therefore, implicitly defined as “chosen”. In the years to follow, as virtually the entire country remained in the hands of the invaders, out of reach of its guarantors' liberating efforts, Belgium's status in Entente discourse shifted from hero to emblem of sacrifice.

### 3 A NARROW PEDESTAL: THE DANGERS OF ELEVATION

The shift of the allegorical representation of Belgium from the heroic via the martyred to the victimized entailed a gendered vision: from knight to martyred maiden. *King Albert's Book*—the title itself was programmatic—still predominantly channelled the heroic and the active vision. But this

did not preclude the occasional gendered rendering of the notion of “Belgium’s honour”. The book’s introduction, by the novelist Hall Caine, stated:

Although one of the smallest and least aggressive of the countries of Europe, the daughter among the nations, Belgium, true to her lofty political idealism, (...) [drew] the sword, after the sword had been drawn against her, in defence of her honour, her national integrity, her right to be mistress in her own house. (*King Albert’s Book*: 5)

The emphasis was still on the heroic and the active, yet a small and neutral nation expecting to be left alone could only be portrayed as feminine. A comparable ambivalence touched the illustrations in *King Albert’s Book*: pictures of the monarch or of generic chivalrous figures<sup>12</sup> stood alongside representations of Belgium as a woman, usually semi-naked.<sup>13</sup> The point should not be exaggerated: all nations were allegorized in feminine form. Still, the erotic tone of some of the images presaged the development of a victimized and helpless image with strong overtones of sexual assault. As German rule over Belgium endured, written and visual references to rape became more common in the representation of the invaded country abroad. (In France, by contrast, early images of the French nation as a woman being raped receded before “a more heroic symbolism” after the successful defence on the Marne in September 1914 (Harris 1993: 172)). The famous cartoon *Seduction* by the Dutch artist Louis Raemaekers, for instance, depicted Belgium in the guise of a young woman, bound, gagged and half naked, under the lustful eye of her German captor.<sup>14</sup> Another depicts Belgium murdered, while complicit onlookers mutter: “We would have paid”. Belgium here is like the virtuous matron Lucretia, preferring death to rape—heroic to be sure; but dead, and female, and at the mercy of male sexual violence.

It is possible that an insistence on rape may have been a means to translate the obligations of international law into more urgent, gendered considerations: the “Rape of Belgium” as a metaphor of violated independence becoming, crudely and stirringly, the rape of Belgians (Gullace 1997).<sup>15</sup> That was certainly the case once the United States entered the war, a process of very rapid and brutal mobilization that required a great deal of rabble-rousing rhetoric (Gregory 2004: 34–39).<sup>16</sup> It remains to be seen whether or not the rape image actually dominated the view of invaded Belgium abroad. Contemporary opinion tends to believe that it did. The

British novelist Pat Barker refers to a rape poster in her 2008 novel *Life Class*: “It’s difficult to persuade young men to lay down their lives to preserve the balance of power in Europe. Some other cause had to be found, more firmly rooted in biological instinct. Pretty young girls with their blouses ripped off did the trick nicely. God, the cynicism of it.” (Barker 2008: 294 f.). But the novel does not identify the poster. Nor has the publisher ever responded to this author’s request to provide details. Barker’s representation, therefore, may owe slightly more to the post-war vilification of recruitment propaganda than to actual propaganda in wartime.<sup>17</sup>

Still, the image of “suffering Belgium” *was* overwhelmingly female. There was, it seems, hardly any space in this discourse for men who were unarmed, and unarmed victimized civilians had to be represented as women or children or old men. In reality, however, the “suffering Belgians”—those who had been targeted in the massacres of 1914 and those who were deported as forced labourers from 1916 onwards—were mostly men. And there was another element of tension. The hecatomb at the front placed enormous strain on the distinction made in mobilization rhetoric between “atrocities” (unacceptable violence against civilians) and “warfare” (laudable or at least necessary violence between armed men). The highlighting of the former to justify the latter was stretched to capacity. By the end of 1914, the military body count already dwarfed the number of civilian deaths, and this chasm would only deepen. Mobilization rhetoric, as we know, came under fire in what has been called the “impossible year” of 1917 (Becker 1997). The enormity of the war losses blurred distinctions of violence. To give one example, the French writer and soldier Pierre Chaine described such a shift in 1917:

His unsophisticated mind had trouble grasping the notion of ethics of war because he saw war itself as the negation of ethics. (...) Distinguishing “necessary cruelties” from “useless barbarities” seemed a convoluted and shaky effort to him. He did not see why killing civilians was worse than waiting until they were in uniform before dismembering them (...). (Schoentjes 2008: 7; trans. De Schaepdrijver)

For all that, this relative shift in perspective—from atrocities *in* warfare to the war *as* atrocity—did not cause combatants to countenance actually losing the war; and, for all the sarcasm directed at civilians, defending the unarmed remained a robust enough reason to hold out.<sup>18</sup> According to



John Horne and Alan Kramer “invasion and occupation remained central to the western Allies’ perception of the war” (Horne and Kramer 2001: 325). The restoration of Belgium remained a non-negotiable Entente war aim to the end, and not exclusively due to considerations of balance-of-power. Similarly, the rhetoric of sympathy for Belgium, though it abated after 1915, did translate into an international relief effort of a hitherto unimaginable magnitude: the neutral *Committee for Relief in Belgium* (CRB), staffed by American envoys until 1917, as well as by Dutch and Spanish agents, was the largest food-aid operation in history.<sup>19</sup>

The worldwide charitable donations to the CRB (most of them from Britain and its dominions) had considerably dwindled by 1916; during the second half of the war, the supplies shipped to the occupied country were largely purchased—on credit—by the Belgian government in exile. Help also had its price. As the war went on and belligerents’ resources were further depleted, Belgium was pressed to greater exertions. French and British representatives urged King Albert, as commander-in-chief of the Belgian army, to enrol his forces in Entente offensives, and they put pressure on the Belgian government to draft men from refugee communities. These urgings met with a mixed response from Belgium’s leadership and citizenry.

#### 4 RELUCTANT MARTYRS: BELGIUM’S WAR EFFORT BETWEEN MOBILIZATION AND SELF-PRESERVATION

To some extent, there was no longer such a thing as Belgium’s “leadership” or “citizenry”: because of the invasion, the occupation, and the mass exodus, Belgium-at-war consisted of a set of dispersed constituencies, cash-strapped, out of their depth, and in tenuous touch with each other. The army, the occupied, the exiles, the government, and the monarch experienced the war within different worlds. The army held the Yser front in the outer western corner of Belgium, where the King also resided, while the cabinet and its threadbare staff stayed 300 kilometres further west, in Le Havre, cut off from the population and from most members of Parliament. Dispersed refugee communities entertaining radically divergent views of the war existed in France, Britain, and the Netherlands. The occupied country, where internal communication and mobility were very severely curtailed, was largely cut off from the outside world, including the army. Belgium possessed no “home front” in other belligerents’ sense

of the term; its war was fought in exile, while the resources of the occupied country were diverted to the German war effort (De Schaepdrijver 1997). This position put its stamp on the Belgian war effort.

On the one hand, the Belgian war aim was as concrete and irrefutable as a war aim could be: Belgians were fighting to liberate their country. On the other hand, the occupied country was, as it were, hostage to total war: the very goal of liberation might prove self-defeating. King Albert, extremely sceptical of the prospects of “fighting to the finish” in spite of his martial image, warned his cabinet in June 1917 that the depletion of the occupied population’s health might have irrevocable political consequences:

We may be sure that if the country suffers famine, it will never forgive us. (...) I will go further: neither you, nor your colleagues, nor myself will ever return to Brussels if this alarming situation endures. The royal Belgian government’s incapacity to speak up to save seven million compatriots, for whom, in spite of the invasion, it remains responsible—what a formidable argument in the hands of revolutionaries!<sup>20</sup>

Albert was exhorting his ministers to “speak up” and protest against British reluctance to allow shipments of CRB food to occupied Belgium.<sup>21</sup>

From the outset, CRB relief shipments had constituted a breach in Britain’s continental blockade, tolerated *de facto* but never permanently granted. The history of the relief effort was punctuated by British restrictions. These restrictions followed a war logic that from the British point of view was irrefutable: the relief effort absolved Germany of the burden of feeding Belgium, weakened the impact of attrition and prolonged the war (Marks 1981: 23). From the Belgian point of view, of course, that same war logic meant sacrificing the occupied population, and possibly all hopes of restoring Belgium. This clash of perspectives exemplified the Belgian paradox: securing the defeat of Germany was the only way to restore Belgium,<sup>22</sup> but a pyrrhic victory had to be avoided. Among Belgians both abroad and under German rule, the physical exhaustion of the occupied, the ravages of the mass unemployment caused by the paralysis of industry, the Germans’ forced deportation of Belgian labourers, their fuelling of linguistic discontent (*Flamenpolitik*) and other depredations fed fears of an irrevocable depletion of those “vital resources” (including work skills and national goodwill) needed to repair the staggering damage caused by the war. A secret speech given in occupied Antwerp on 20th July 1917

painted a dire picture of threats to Belgium's "physiological capital": mortality in the paralyzed port city had risen to 23% from the 13.5% of 1913. Moreover, the speaker warned, Belgium's competitive position would be eroded by the end of the war:

France will have become a great industrial power, and we congratulate her for it; England, our noble great friend, has nearly doubled her steel production! (...) And on that enlarged theatre, amidst more expert and robust actors, we will have to take up our role again, after what we have gone through (...). (Royal Palace Archives, file 343)<sup>23</sup>

From the summer of 1916 onwards, reports on the deepening misery of the occupied country greatly alarmed the government. By and large, the course taken was that of committing to the common war effort while safeguarding the nation's demographic resources.<sup>24</sup> Drafting refugees from the various countries in which they had settled was postponed as much as possible, since the small size of the army served as argument to keep it out of the largest offensives.<sup>25</sup> A draft was ultimately introduced in the summer of 1916; even so it allowed for a wide range of exemptions, and recruitment for the armaments industry was forcefully promoted as an alternative. The preamble to the draft law explicitly stated the necessity to preserve demographic resources through recruitment for war efforts other than military service:

Considering the principle that no Belgian can afford to be a useless servant to the suffering Fatherland, the Government feels duty-bound to employ those forces still at its disposal with the greatest possible discernment, and without imposing unnecessary sacrifice on any category of citizens. The conditions of modern warfare reveal ever more clearly the importance of the armaments industries and of other pursuits of necessity to the armies. Nothing would conform less to a wisely realistic policy and to the well-understood interests of the Fatherland than to take away those who dedicate their work and expertise to these services and industries, and subject them to a belated and uniform military instruction. (Amara 2014, chapter VIII; trans. De Schaepe drijver)<sup>26</sup>

This ambivalence may have had a dampening effect on whatever patriotism refugees harboured. As one Belgian residing in Paris wrote to his son who was about to appear before the Belgian recruitment board in Rotterdam:

Evidently, not everyone has been as eager as you to respond to the appeal. (...) If the Belgian government had taken the same measure (...), then I would not protest, on the contrary, I could then only approve.<sup>27</sup>

The ambivalence of the draft made sense from a national preservationist point of view, but, it seems, on occasion rather less so vis-à-vis the individual citizen, inclined to accuse the “wisely realistic policy” of a great deal of favouritism.

Equally awkward was the task of charting a course between mobilization and self-preservation vis-à-vis the Entente, which was suffering such enormous losses.<sup>28</sup> The Belgian government’s main diplomatic weapon consisted of reiterated references to what Belgium had done in 1914. It is no coincidence that, in 1917, Nobel Prize Winner Maurice Maeterlinck wrote a play, *The Burgomaster of Stilmonde*, intended to remind the world of Belgium’s plight and noble stance in 1914. It was a stilted, agitprop effort, which Maeterlinck was to repudiate afterward, but it drew worldwide sympathy—in Buenos Aires, among other places—and would be made into a film after the war (De Schaepdrijver 2002: 94ff.). Referring to 1914 was more than a manipulative ploy: these spokesmen were in exile, grieving for a battered country. And it did correspond to a widespread, if never officially acknowledged, feeling among Belgians abroad that their nation by its initial resistance and present endurance had done what it could for the common cause and must now concentrate on restoration of its pre-war prosperity and stability. But this somewhat-less-than-self-immolating stance aroused criticism abroad: Belgian refugee communities, for instance, were reproached for “shirking” their military obligations.<sup>29</sup> Whether this pragmatic stance significantly altered international perceptions of Belgium during the war, remains an open question. Certainly, from 1916, references to the “atrocities” of 1914 and to “martyred Belgium” became less frequent; the symbolic overinvestment of the first year of the war abated.<sup>30</sup>

However, the more-or-less gendered mix of both active and passive images of 1914–1915 endured, albeit at a lesser pitch of intensity. More negative images did not, as yet, crystallize. Belgium’s awkward identity as the international community’s protégée intensified with the USA entering the war: “the daughter among the nations” became “the ward of the world”.<sup>31</sup> Images of victimization, including sexual victimization, likewise endured.<sup>32</sup> But they did stand alongside more active representations of Belgian resistance in the occupied country (the underground newspaper *La Libre Belgique*, for instance, became an emblem of pluck), and, from

September 1918, of the Belgian army's role in the liberation offensive.<sup>33</sup> As with other assessments of the war and of its justifications, the judgment on Belgium did not significantly shift until after the Armistice.

## 5 CONCLUSION: A LESS THAN TOTAL WAR

Belgium's rejection of the German ultimatum had been a deliberate choice to uphold international agreements as the only viable safeguard for small nations. Subsequent popular approval within Belgium indicated that this adherence to agreements by and large corresponded to a vernacular sense of justice, at least during the first half of the occupation.<sup>34</sup> Rejecting the ultimatum in the face of war had constituted, in a way, a leap of faith undertaken in the interests of greater long-term safety. Contemporaries were not mistaken in detecting the far-ranging implications of this otherwise almost pragmatic choice; in tune with contemporary feeling, it was a choice to face war in order to protest aggression.

In a similar vein, the 1913 Nobel Peace Prize winner Henri La Fontaine, a socialist Belgian senator noted for his work on international arbitration, would argue after the war, at the League of Nations in 1920, that small nations had the same obligation as others to uphold international treaties:

Belgium thinks that however great the peril which a country might have to undergo under the system which we seek to establish here, that country ought to do its duty. It was thus that Belgium understood its obligations in 1914. (Rappard 1940: 227f.)<sup>35</sup>

But by then, the colossal costs of war and the colossal demands of peace had exacerbated the "sacrifice" criterion and engendered jealous scrutiny of exactly what "peril" Belgium had exposed itself to. At the Versailles peace talks, Lloyd George countered the Belgians' "preposterous" demands by bluntly stating, "the Belgians lost comparatively few men in the war" (MacMillan 2003: 277). This was correct: at war's end, Belgium had lost one man of military age out of fifty; France, one out of six.<sup>36</sup> Rather less correct was John Maynard Keynes' minimization of material—including demographic—damage inflicted on Belgium (Scholliers and Daelemans 1988). But then the ultimate criterion for credibility in the post-war era was the magnitude of the "sacrifice" at the front, and in that light the Belgian case looked weak indeed, especially against the exalted

images drawn in 1914, and especially as some in Belgium started to voice demands on the neutral Netherlands. Visual representations of Belgium at the time of the Versailles peace talks changed accordingly.<sup>37</sup>

Once again, Belgium, as a symbol, took its place in a metanarrative of the war, just as it had done in 1914. This time around, it was held up as the ultimate example of wartime cant: the “pacifist turn” in public opinion of the 1920s viewed the war through the lens of the manipulation of public opinion, and the “Gallant Little Belgium” trope became the prime example of deception.<sup>38</sup> The wholesale dismissal of the war cultures of 1914–1915 left no space for reflection on the small state’s conundrum. I would argue that this was a missed opportunity: in its ambivalence toward military servitude yet striving for security and independence, Belgium’s position in the Great War prefigured that of the smaller nations that emerged out of the war—or, for that matter, that of all of modern Europe today.

## NOTES

1. Keith Wilson has called the reaction of the British public “predictable but untutored” (Wilson 1983: 410).
2. The concept of “war culture” is fruitful if not unproblematic; I use it heuristically here. Cf. Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker (2003).
3. Great Britain (1914), *The Parliamentary Debates (Official report), Fifth Series, Vol. LXVI, House of Commons, Ninth Volume of Session 1914*, p. 191. The Irish MP John Redmond added: “The spectacle of this small nation making these heroic sacrifices in defence of their independence and honour against overwhelming odds appeals in a very special way to the sentiments and the feelings of Ireland.” The House unanimously voted to send an expression of “sympathy and admiration” to King Albert.
4. BBC Radio 4 broadcast a three-part series on *King Albert’s Book* in December 2014: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-one/11295047/Britains-homage-to-plucky-Belgium.html>
5. The composer Ethel Smyth, who contributed a piano arrangement of her 1910 *March of the Women* (the famous anthem that had sustained suffragists in Holloway prison), expressly linked the Belgians’ struggle “in defence of their honour and freedom” to that of “women in England” (*King Albert’s Book*, p. 67). See also Wood (1995).
6. Of the remaining six contributors, two were Belgian (the symbolist writers Emile Verhaeren and Maurice Maeterlinck), two Polish (the pianist Ignace Paderewsky and the novelist Henryk Sienkiewicz), one Portuguese, and

one Japanese (viz., the ambassador to London). The third Dutch contributor was Willem Leendert Bruckman (1866–1928), an artist working in Britain. He sent a rendering of “Louvain Cathedral” (opp. p. 72) and in 1915 he illustrated *The Glory of Belgium*, a tour of medieval cities.

7. These are the words of the Portuguese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Antonio Macieira.
8. Lloyd George’s emphasis on Belgium’s role in “exposing” German designs was not accidental. Unlike some of his colleagues, he had fully expected Germany to invade Belgium, and secured agreement within the British cabinet in advance, over what seemed to some a merely hypothetical issue. His deft anticipation tactic isolated the anti-war cabinet members once the invasion occurred. See also Gilbert (1985).
9. The manipulative dimension would become more prevalent as the war progressed, especially during the mobilization drive in the USA, where propaganda was far more of a professionalized effort than elsewhere (though even here, there was genuine indignation over, for instance, the forced labour deportations of 1916–1917). I use the term “political myth” not to mean a falsehood, but “the continual process of work on a common narrative by which the members of a social group can provide significance to their political conditions and experience”, in the words of Bottici and Challand (2006). On the “mental mobilizations” of World War One see Eksteins (1990) and Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker (2003).
10. Rolland referred to the successful defensive stand against a superior Asian invasion force taken by the Greek troops under General Leonidas in 480 B.C., a battle that had saved Greek civilization from a barbarian onslaught—or so generations of high-school students had been taught. Belgium, then, took its place alongside Thermopylae in the millennia-spanning grand narrative of the battle between plucky Civilization and its brutal enemies. The Thermopylae simile was standard fare in “Belgium 1914” discourse; the trope appears dozens of times in *King Albert’s Book*. American audiences were familiar with it as well (see de Schaepepdrijver 2008b).
11. G.K. Chesterton’s article with the same title, written in the spring of 1915, was intended to appeal to the British public on behalf of Belgian relief.
12. Portrait of the King on p. 2; *Resurgam* by Frank Dicksee opposite p. 32; *St. George and the Dragon* by Briton Rivière, opp. p. 57; *On the Field of Honour* by H. Chandler Christy opp. p. 69; *Aid for the Fallen* by Thomas Brock, opp. p. 77; *Dies Irae* by Maxfield Parrish opp. p. 113; *St. Michael of Belgium* by J.J. Shannon opp. p. 161. To some extent, the small boy in *The Belgian of To-Morrow* by William Nicholson opp. p. 183, is also a heroic representation. There are two other pictures of children, but those are helpless victims.

13. Especially the highly eroticized image by Edmund Dulac opp. p. 81. See also *Justice* by Solomon J. Solomon, opp. p. 53 (though this image is ambivalent); *Unconquerable* by Arthur Rackham, opp. p. 65; *Sympathy* by J. Montgomery Flagg on p. 129; *La Belgique* by Bernard Partridge opp. p. 165. The symbolism of the naked girl in *The Gloomy Thick Wood* by Kay Nielsen opp. p. 105 is less immediately definable.
14. Raemaekers' war cartoons appeared first in the Dutch *Telegraaf*; by late 1915, he had become “the single most influential figure in projecting the Allied vision of the German enemy to home audiences and to the rest of the world” (Horne and Kramer 2001: 297).
15. Cf. Trevor Wilson's observation that Germany's real subversion of civilized standards in its treatment of Belgium “paled into insignificance once tales became current of raped women and mutilated children” (Wilson 1986: 190). This coarsening of discourse appalled some observers. In October 1917, Brand Whitlock, the former U.S. envoy to Brussels, wrote to his literary agent that “the worst that happened there was not the rape of women in Belgium, it was the rape of Belgium” (Nevins 1936: 237).
16. Gregory's study of the *Daily Mail* indicates that “sadistic-sexual” accents were far more rare than accents of outrage over the destruction of material property; compare to Gullace's suggestion regarding the British press (Gullace 1997: 725). One of the reasons, of course, was popular press barons' desire to appear respectable. Needless to say, stories of sexual violence may have resonated disproportionately regardless of their actual occurrence. (With thanks to Adrian Gregory for this information.)
17. The fictional soldier's accusations of sexual mutilation are taken from actual 1914–1915 atrocity lore, such as the more lurid type of church sermons. But there is no indication that the war poster as described actually existed. With thanks to Stephen Badsey, Adrian Gregory, Edward Madigan, Richard Smith, and Dan Todman.
18. On endurance see Leonard V. Smith (1994); on relations between front and home front see Hanna (2006).
19. See Nash (1988), and Gay and Fisher (1929).
20. Albert to Hymans (Minister of Foreign Affairs), June 14, 1917, in Thielemans (1991: 412).
21. In this case, CRB ships were held up at Halifax to protest the German submarine campaign, see Nash (1996: 444–447) and Hoover (1959: 326 f).
22. So thought, by and large, the cabinet; Albert by contrast was not sanguine about the Entente's chances (largely because he considered parliamentary democracies incapable of enduring a war of attrition) and on several occasions from 1915 to 1918 allowed members of his entourage to engage in secret peace discussions with German envoys. These explorations led nowhere because of German reluctance to give up claims on Belgium. See Thielemans (1991).



23. Speech by Louis Franck, president of the Greater Antwerp Council, on the eve of the war's third national holiday, July 20, 1917. The speech did subsequently strike a note of confidence in the resilience of the occupied population. A transcript of the speech was smuggled out of the country and relayed to King Albert. Franck was later deported to Germany because of his resistance to *Flamenpolitik*.
24. The Liberal members of the cabinet were more willing to ally themselves fully with the Entente war effort. See the relevant chapters in Thielemans (1991) and Haag (1990).
25. This was the King's strategy, shared by several Catholic ministers, though not by his chairman of the Belgian cabinet in exile Charles De Broqueville (Thielemans 1991: 77–79).
26. Preamble to the July 21, 1916, *arrêté-loi* on the draft; quoted in Amara (2014), chapter VIII: “Aux armes, réfugiés!” The labour schemes of the Belgian government in exile, and refugees' reactions to them, are documented in great detail in other chapters of this study.
27. The measure referred to here is the French government's drafting the vast majority of fit men. Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, Château de Vincennes (France), *Commission Militaire du Contrôle Postal de Dieppe*, report of May 14, 1917, quoting a letter written on November 17, 1916.
28. In 1916, for instance, Belgian attempts to make the most of military successes in central Africa could be countered, on the British side, by indignant references to sacrifices in Flanders Fields (Marks 1981: 49).
29. This was much more prevalent in Britain (especially from 1916) than in France (Amara 2014, chapters IV, VI, VIII, and IX).
30. Except, of course, in the United States, where they were revived for the purposes of mobilization.
31. The *New York Times* editorial of July 21, 1918 (Belgian Independence Day, widely celebrated in the USA that year) referred to Germany's “destruction of the scrap of paper which made Belgium a ward of the world”, thus reminding its readers of the importance of the 1914 violation of neutrality. “Belgium's Independence Day”, July 21, 1918, p. 22.
32. For a famous image of sexual victimization, see the 1918 Ellsworth Young war-bonds poster *Remember Belgium*, depicting a dark-silhouetted German soldier leading away a young girl against the backdrop of a burning city. The 1918, illustrated “novel” *The Unpardonable Sin*, written by the prolific playwright and later Hollywood screenwriter Rupert Hughes, mobilized the trope of sexual outrage and revenge: an American mother and daughter, stranded in Belgium in 1914, are raped by the invading troops (“Mamma and I are to be mothers,” the daughter writes in a letter smuggled out of the country. “But we don't know who—so many—I can't write—I can't die”).

33. During the last year of the war, the *New York Times* published some 300 articles referring to Belgium. Most of them gave news about the occupied country, its deprivation and resistance; reports on the Belgian army became more frequent from September 1918. Several of the longer articles were written by the famous British correspondent Philip Gibbs, who had published an account of the invasion in 1915, *The Soul of the War*, but would, in 1920, write an indictment of atrocity-mongering, *Realities of War*.
34. The patriotic press in the occupied country echoed this priority in its continued insistence upon Belgium's international status; see de Schaepdrijver (2011).
35. La Fontaine referred to a proposed system of international sanctions against aggressor nations.
36. This does not mean that losses at the actual front were that much lower—they were not—but the mobilization rate was, mainly because of military occupation. Only 20% of Belgian men of military age had served, as against 54% in Britain and 89% in France.
37. One Dutch cartoon, expressing horror at Belgian attempts to obtain borderland territorial gain, depicted “annexationism” as a withered witch, stretching out a greedy hand to the children of Mother Holland and Mother France; see Braakensiek (1918). It is worth investigating whether this cartoon indicates a more general shift in representation. For an excellent study of Belgian diplomacy at Versailles and the devaluation of the 1914 aura, see Marks (1981).
38. On the “pacifist turn” see Horne and Kramer (2001: 366–375). On “Belgium 1914” as a trope of ridicule see de Schaepdrijver (2002: 94–114).

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## CHAPTER 3

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# The Flames of Louvain: Total War and the Destruction of European High Culture in Belgium by German Occupying Forces in August 1914

*John P. Williams*

## I INTRODUCTION

The destruction of the Belgian university town of Louvain (Flemish Leuven), over a period of five days in August 1914 by German occupying forces heralded the onset of a particular type of war—“total war”—in which the conventions of combat were disregarded and all civilian resources and infrastructure were deemed legitimate targets (Hull 2005: 205 f.).<sup>1</sup> The savage “sack of Louvain” set a precedent for identifying enemy civilians, regardless of age or gender, as legitimate targets. The measures taken against the Belgian civil populations in Aarschot, Andenne, Tamines, Dinant, and Louvain in August 1914 for alleged *franc-tireur* (sniper) activity represent Germany’s policy of swift and thorough retribution for civilian resistance, which serves as the first instance of German wartime terror. In addition to over 200 civilian casualties, the sacking of Louvain also saw its ancient library destroyed.

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This chapter serves three purposes: firstly to discuss the invasion by German troops of neutral Belgium during the month of August 1914 and the destruction of Louvain in the last days of that month; secondly, to identify the motives of German occupying forces for destroying such a culturally rich university town; and thirdly, to discuss the world's reaction to the German actions in Louvain as well as the response of the intellectual community in Germany. Ultimately, this study will illustrate how the destruction of Louvain galvanized the resolve of the combatants of the First World War to shoulder the cost of defeating the Germans.

The Great War ushered in violence that went beyond the bounds of the pre-war Hague Conventions (Kramer 2007: 25). The 1907 Hague Convention of Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land attempted to confine the effects of military violence to combatants, but stressed the protection of civilians and their property and prevented wilful destruction of cultural monuments and public buildings. It also provided for civilian militias and volunteers to take up arms to resist invasion. The acts perpetrated by the Germans in both Belgium and France during the early weeks of the war not only set the tone for war-time debates centring on violence against civilians, but also established a new distinction between “just” violence in war, and wartime atrocities. Reports of the killing of civilians, even after the truth was separated from the exaggerations of propaganda, would disgrace the Germans in the eyes of the world, giving their enemies reason to argue that this was a war to save civilization (Horne and Kramer 2001: 422). Like much of Belgium, Louvain had the misfortune to be on the route of the German invading army heading towards France. The German war plans had called for a two-front war with holding actions against Russia, the enemy to the east, and a rapid invasion and defeat of France to the west. Belgium, a neutral country, was meant to acquiesce quietly as German troops marched southwards (MacMillan 2013: xxi). However, the Belgians did not accept the terms of the German ultimatum put to them on 2nd August and by refusing free passage to German troops on 3rd August triggered the German invasion of Belgian sovereign soil on 4th August. The events that occurred at Louvain have been classed as a classic example of the horrific acts perpetrated on civilian populations by occupying forces.

## 2 FROM LIÈGE TO LOUVAIN

The carnage of Louvain was not a unique act of total warfare involving the civilian population, but it stands out due to the extremity of the atrocities perpetrated. The German troops had not been warned to expect strong opposition on entering Belgium. Surprised and enraged by an unexpected resistance, the German soldiers were in a state of heightened nervousness induced by their first experience of combat. They were immediately susceptible to the first cry of “snipers!” They soon imagined that behind every house and hedgerow armed civilians were waiting for them and the image of the terrible *franc-tireur* of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871 was conjured into massive proportions (Kramer 2007: 20). The collective delusion of the *franc-tireurs* was intensified by rumours of gruesome mutilations committed upon German soldiers. Such rumours took on mythical proportions and contributed greatly to the German image of the *franc-tireurs*.

The first obstacles to the invading force were the forts around Liège (Tuchman 1962: 176). Faced with shelling from these forts, the German troops retaliated by rounding up people from surrounding villages and shooting them. Those who did not die instantly were killed with bayonets. Liège fell on 7th August, although the last forts stood firm for another nine days, and by 8th August, nearly 850 civilians were dead. German officials felt justified in these killings since they believed the Belgian military defence was illegitimate, an argument based on the principle that the German army was just “passing through” (ibid.).

By 20th August, most of the German invasion force had crossed into Belgium. In a twenty-day period German troops, exhausted by forced marches and often under the influence of alcohol, committed a series of large-scale massacres, pillaged and burned towns and villages, and deported the survivors (De Schaepdrijver 2013). The hardest hit places were Aarschot on 19th August, Andenne on 20th August, and the small industrial town of Taminies on the Meuse, where 383 inhabitants were killed, on 22nd August. The Germans then advanced to the city of Dinant, where on 23rd August over 674 people were killed (Tollebeek and van Assche 2014: 81). They then proceeded to the university town of Louvain, arriving on 23rd August, where the treasured university library was burned and several hundred civilians killed (De Schaepdrijver 2014: 3). Louvain and Dinant thus became tragic twins—so-called “martyr cities”. The medieval university town of Louvain, considered by many to be the “Oxford of Belgium”, suffered not only loss



of life but also the significant loss of cultural artefacts and architecture. It held treasures of Flemish Gothic and Renaissance architecture, paintings, manuscripts and books. The destruction of the medieval library in Louvain resulted in the loss of over 230,000 books, including a collection of 750 medieval manuscripts. In addition, several buildings associated with the university, such as the church of St. Pierre, were destroyed by fire (Zuckerman 2004: 33).<sup>2</sup> As a consequence of the invasion, 1100 buildings were destroyed, 248 civilians killed (regardless of age or gender), and the majority of the population of 42,000 were forcibly evacuated into the countryside (Kramer 2007: 314).<sup>3</sup> The occupation of Louvain was accomplished with a deliberate eye to securing maximum civilian cooperation through acts of terror and destruction of cultural identity. At no time did German officials or members of the High Command consider their actions as violations of international law. In fact, they interpreted legal sanctions “to mean that an effective occupying force had the right to treat civilian resistance as rebellious and to punish resisters by summary execution and collective reprisal” (Keegan 1999: 81 f.). While Belgian officials had tried to comply with orders not to interfere with German operational plans, “the rage of the Belgian people, attacked so grossly and without warning, in defiance of international law”, was compounded when they came into direct contact with its invaders (Fox 1915: 23).

For Henry Sessions Souttar, a British surgeon posted to Belgium in 1914, the sacking of Louvain by German forces followed one of the most elementary rules of logical warfare:

If an army wishes to pass through a country, the civil population is in the way. To get rid of them, the best plan and the quickest, is to annihilate the first town of a suitable size to which an army comes. If the town is wiped out, and men, and women and children slaughtered indiscriminately it will make such an impression in the rest of the country that the whole population will clear out and there will be no more trouble (...), to kill a hundred women and children makes a greater impression than killing a thousand men, and it is safer. (Souttar 1915: 71)

For Souttar, logical warfare included ignoring treaties and, indeed, the truth in any form. He also noted that since Germany was the home of logic—the temple where material progress is worshipped like a god—she could not help herself. However, Souttar objected to Germany’s logic, noting that it is the duty of the civilized world, if it values its eternal

salvation, to blot out from the face of the earth the nation which practises such logic.

The destruction of Louvain and the slaughter of its inhabitants had the desired effect upon much of Belgium. Wherever the German army arrived, they entered, with few exceptions, towns that were virtually empty. Belgian civilians fled in droves from the nearing atrocities. It is estimated that some two million Belgians were fleeing: ‘Termonde, Malines, and Antwerp had everything swept and garnished for their reception’ (Souttar 1915: 71). Souttar concluded his observations of Germany’s invasion of Belgium that Germany, in destroying more cities in Belgium, also destroyed her own soul in the process (ibid.: 72).

### 3 THE SACKING OF LOUVAIN: MOTIVES AND CONSEQUENCES

The motives of German occupying forces for destroying a culturally rich university town such as Louvain have tangled origins. These beginnings include preconceived notions of atrocities being carried out by *franc-tireurs* on occupying forces reminiscent of the same atrocities carried out by French citizens during Franco-Prussian War of 1871. The animosity towards civilian populations also included antipathy toward the Catholic clergy, who were charged with leading the French resistance and inciting insurrection by encouraging guerrilla resistance in 1871 (Meyer 2007: 81 f.).

Another contributing factor included the fact that German troops were deluged with sensationalized press accounts of Belgian atrocities against occupying German forces. The destruction of Louvain also contributed to propaganda disseminated by the senior German officers and the German press. From the outset, German newspapers carried sensationalized accounts of German soldiers being mutilated and killed by Belgian townsfolk (Meyer 2007: 139). Read by troops on the front line, these stories angered and frightened the soldiers, resulting in an escalation of violence. German officers and their charges were focused on the idea that Belgians themselves made neutrality impossible (Horne and Kramer 2001: 3).

While the Germans used propaganda in order to inflame its troops and citizens, the Allies also used propaganda to reinforce their position. This was especially true with reports published by British journalists, statesmen, and public intellectuals. These entities went to great lengths to exploit

sensational stories of German atrocities perpetrated in Belgium during the course of the war: “German soldiers eating Belgian babies; German soldiers hanging Belgian nuns between church bells and ringing them to death; German soldiers crucifying dozens of farmers by the roadside” (Milne 2017).<sup>4</sup> The British government, headed by Prime Minister Herbert Asquith, commissioned James Bryce to prepare an independent report based on eyewitness accounts of the German atrocities in Belgium in 1914. Allied opinion was initially influenced by the opening phase of the war, as the circumstances of its outbreak and the initial experience of actual and potential violations—personal, local, and national—provided much of the justification for retaliation against the Germans for their actions in Belgium.

While German and Allied propaganda played an important role justifying the occupying forces to wage total war, another factor loomed large—the unrealistic mobilization schedules based on the Schlieffen Plan of 1905 (Kramer 2007: 31).<sup>5</sup> Army Chief of Staff Helmuth von Moltke was largely responsible for Germany’s military decision to fight a two-front war. Moltke had spent over a decade making modifications to the Schlieffen Plan. Central to the success of this plan was speed and avoidance of anything that slowed the German army down or allowed Russia to mobilize its army and enter the war before France had been taken out. This plan placed great emphasis on speed and penetration while avoiding German losses. It also took for granted that neutral nations such as Belgium and Luxembourg would allow the German armies to bypass French fortifications. These motivations together provided a rationale in the German mind for sacking Louvain and other Belgian cities (Meyer 2007: 80 f.).

Alan Kramer argues that the destruction of Louvain and other towns and villages defies logic, since each of these towns was obviously more useful intact as practical accommodation and supply bases for the German First Army (Kramer 2007: 20). He also contends, however, that Louvain’s status as the intellectual centre of Belgian Catholicism served as a powerful incentive for violence by the German army. Anti-Catholicism was a powerful element in Germany’s desire to subjugate its rival’s cultural symbolism and heritage. Therefore, religious intolerance was featured as a part of the missionary sense of militaristic nationalism (*ibid.*). This missionary zeal was further enhanced by stories told to German soldiers prior to the entering of Louvain that *Pfaffen* (the derogatory word for Catholic priests) had led hordes of Belgians in the attacks upon German troops, which involved such infamies as the slitting of throats and castration (*ibid.*: 41).

### 3.1 *The World's Reaction*

The destruction of Louvain's cultural heritage and the treatment of its citizens provoked international criticism almost immediately. Press headlines from leading news agencies routinely referred to these acts as "German barbarism and rivers of blood unfounded and unprecedented" (Gilbert 1994: 43). To chronicle the carnage in the aftermath of the sack of Louvain, university officials commissioned a photographic report. Pictures were published in illustrated magazines in London and Paris, and were reproduced as postcards, sold clandestinely in occupied Belgium. Local newspapers in Britain alone printed over 1,000 articles on Louvain in August, and more than 2,500 in September.<sup>6</sup> News reports could not, however, rely upon normal systems of information gathering, and newspapers obtained only piecemeal reports or, increasingly, stories, part-hearsay, from internally displaced Belgians and refugees. Journalists had to make do with whatever official information was released, with limited information from eyewitnesses, and with their own access to the invasion zone. Many stories came from telegraph agencies or were borrowed from other newspapers. The French newspapers *Le Temps* and *L'Illustration*, for example, were dependent on the British press for their coverage of Belgium. It was only later when diaries retrieved from dead Belgian, German, and French soldiers that the gaps were filled.

Worldwide condemnation of Germany's actions would serve as a public relations coup for many of the Allied nations at the start of the war. The symbolism of the destruction of Louvain was not lost on the press. Reports and pictures in the opening weeks of the war had a powerful effect on public opinion. Bold headlines adorned the front pages: "The Oxford of Belgium Burnt by the German Huns" proclaimed *The Illustrated London News*; "Holocaust of Louvain" screamed the *Daily Mail* (Kramer 2007: 13). By mid-September the University of Cambridge offered professors and members of staff of the University of Louvain facilities to continue their work at Cambridge. This was soon copied by other universities, such as Oxford, and London-based institutions. In Ireland, the nationalist John Redmond organized a rally to denounce Germany's actions. The Irish voiced their condemnation of the destruction of Louvain and emphasized the links between Irish Catholics and the University of Louvain. To some, the burning of Louvain was reminiscent of the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), with its religious overtones and destructive effect upon humanity and culture (ibid., 14). In Italy, news of the destruction of

Louvain made an immediate and deep impact. Leading Italian intellectuals condemned the “cultural atrocities” and barbaric actions of the Germans. This and other atrocities in both Belgium and France played a role in Italy’s estrangement from its allies Germany and Austria: the image of *questo sventurato paese* (this unfortunate country) as well as sympathies for Belgium as a Catholic nation played a major role in building Italy’s later-found sympathy with the Allies (ibid., 15).

American and European universities promptly denounced the sacking of Louvain and committees were formed in 25 countries to collect money and books for the restoration of the Louvain library (Derez 2014: 9).<sup>7</sup> Architects, artists, and other intellectuals protested at the German actions and urged state leaders to intervene. In the minds of many heads of states, not only was the destruction of Louvain beyond words, but also the destruction of the great Cathedral in Rheims had done more damage than a lost battle (ibid., 19). The total disregard for Belgian citizens and culture had provided allied nations with the fodder it needed to wage a war of public opinion against Germany as well as to muster the necessary resources to retaliate.

The worldwide condemnation of Germany’s war against culture bit deep in the homeland. In response, Germany justified its actions in 1914 as having been reprisals against terrorists. This happened on many levels. At the local level, only a few days after destroying parts of the city, the local Etappen-Kommandant von Manteuffel was interviewed by the Dutch journalist Lambertus Mokveld for the Dutch newspaper *De Tijd*. Von Manteuffel laid the blame for the destruction entirely with the Belgians (Mokveld 1916: 79). Mokveld urged foreign correspondents to come to Louvain to see the destruction for themselves, but the next day he was arrested. At the German national level, the German press agency Wolff circulated the story that the fire that had swept through the city’s centre had started spontaneously.<sup>8</sup> At an international level, German justification for attacking civilians and burning the library in Louvain appeared in the *German White Book* of 1915 (Bernstein 1915). The *White Book* was highly selective in its use of evidence, leaving out many details that might have shown German guilt (Keegan 1999: 81–83). The Belgian Ministry of Justice replied with their own account of the German atrocities in 1916 with the *Belgian Grey Book*, which included a list of civilian victims and testimonies of witnesses. Those citizens who testified reported that many civilians had refrained from hostilities. Other witnesses asserted that German soldiers had mistakenly fired into their own troops in confusion.

For Germany to be viewed by the world as a burner of books cut educated Germans to the quick, since they saw themselves as having been at the centre of philosophical, classical and historical scholarship since the eighteenth century. German intellectuals also appealed to patriotism, representing the war as an attack of barbarians, philistines and decadents—Russians, British and French respectively—on German civilization. Scholars and writers responded with an *Aufruf an die Kulturwelt* [Call to the World of Culture] signed by eminent authors and scientists including Gerhart Hauptmann, Andreas Heusler, Max Planck and Wilhelm Röntgen.<sup>9</sup> This document endorsed the *franc-tireur* hypothesis and the right to reprisal, and claimed that if it had not been for German soldiers, German culture would have long been swept away. The question remains as to whether the German scholars believed it appropriate to side with the destruction of books and culture, having been caught up in patriotic frenzy, or whether they were speaking out of political necessity (Keegan 1999: 81–83).

One of the direct consequences of the destruction of Louvain and other important centres of learning in Belgium and France during the Great War was the establishment of military art-protection divisions. Authorities in both countries took steps to protect their cultural heritage as a means not only to advance cultural-political propaganda, but also to recognize the fundamental incompatibility of German war aims with its proclaimed position as a world leader of *Kultur*.

#### 4 CONCLUSION

The events at Louvain foreshadowed a wider wave of cultural destruction and mass killing that would sweep through the world during the Second World War. Moreover, civilian casualties as an integral part of “total war”, and the slaughter of women and children first to intimidate and then to silence the remainder of the population, became a cornerstone of many regional conflicts during the twentieth century. The actions of German occupying forces in Louvain set a precedent for identifying enemy civilians, regardless of age or gender, as legitimate targets for annihilation, and became an endurable trope of war. In a cynical twist of history, Sarajevo, where Gavrilo Princip assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand at the end of June 1914 and triggered the outbreak of hostilities between Austria-Hungary and Serbia, also saw the burning of its library, the National Library, by Serbs in August 1992.

In 1914, however, following the invasion of Belgium and advance into France, German violence abated and the war turned into a stalemate. The occupied territories of Belgium and northern France remained under German military power throughout the war. Although violence against civilians continued, four years of occupation saw individual executions and occasional killings abate. The Germans had achieved their goal of cultural domination and subjugated not only the enemy nation of Belgium but also the culture through which it defined itself.

In 2014, Louvain marked the one hundredth anniversary of its sacking with a concert to symbolize Europe's shared cultural heritage. It included Mozart's *Requiem* and the Flemish composer, Piet Swaerts, composed an oratorio, played by the Flanders Symphony Orchestra and conducted by a Briton, David Angus. The concert, which was accompanied by a projection of flames on the library of the University of Louvain, delivered a "message of peace and reconciliation" (Waterfield 2014: 1), and demonstrated how culture can heal and unite people who have been divided by war (Fig. 3.1).



Fig. 3.1 The sacking of Louvain (Bruno Waterfield. *The Sacking of Louvain*, accessed September 13, 2016. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/belgium/11053962/The-city-that-turned-Germans-into-Huns-marks-100-years-since-it-was-set-ablaze.html>)



## NOTES

1. For Hull, “total war” means the complete mobilization of civilians, civil society, and especially of the economy for the war effort—something Hull argues Germany never achieved during the First World War.
2. The Germans also disabled the city’s water pump and torched the town water company headquarters. The city’s water pressure was thus reduced and the efforts to extinguish the fires thwarted.
3. The city of Louvain, much of which had been destroyed in August 1914, was later rebuilt. The university library was rebuilt with American aid in the interwar years and Germany carried out its promise under the Treaty of Versailles to make restitution for the collection of books burnt in 1914. Yet in 1940, German artillery destroyed the library a second time.
4. Milne notes that the Bryce Report was largely discredited by historians and scholars in the 1920s and 1930s (see Ponsonby’s *Falsehood in War-Time* (1928) and Willis’ *England’s Holy War* (1928)). Even though Bryce was largely respected by his peers in both Europe and America for his work as US Ambassador and the presence of extreme views on German acts of brutality were never doubted, the report’s tendency to dwell upon lurid eyewitness accounts caused it to fall into some discredit. The scrutiny of the Bryce Report, along with biased reporting in both the *German White Book*: and the *Belgian Grey Book*, led many government officials and media outlets to hold official reports in contempt (see Duffy 2009).
5. Germany went to war in 1914 with a conception of the war of annihilation that was based on the military doctrine developed by Alfred von Schlieffen, chief of the Prussian general staff from 1891 to 1905. His ideas would dominate German military theory and practice in the era of the First and Second World Wars. The Schlieffen Plan of 1906–1914 was based on the extreme reading of the great early nineteenth-century theorist on war, Carl von Clausewitz. It was von Clausewitz who argued the actions of the German troops upon a civilian population was sanctioned due to the fact that the populations of an enemy country should not be exempted from war, but should be made to feel its effects and be forced to put pressure on their government to surrender.
6. Online British Library Newspaper Archives (accessed 5 March 2017).
7. By the end of the war, 239 institutions were working together to collect materials to restore Louvain’s historic library. The university’s library would hold one of the richest collections of books and manuscripts between two wars, but in 1940 over 900,000 volumes would be lost as a result of German bombing.
8. See René Chambry (1915), *Die Wahrheit über Löwen*. Lausanne: Payot.
9. See Jürgen von Ungern-Sternberg and Wolfgang von Ungern-Sternberg (1996).



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# Furies, Spies and Fallen Women: Gender in German Public Discourse About Belgium, 1914–1918

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In a 2013 interview, Klaus Theweleit described the plot of *Pocahontas*<sup>1</sup> as a symbolic fairy tale that metaphorized the violence of America's founding. Annexations need to imagine helping a woman, he concluded. The act of annexation can thus be told as a love story—a male character captures a woman's heart, the female character gives in and the two become one (Theweleit 2013: 32). This is a promising thesis, but is it also valid for a historical discourse of annexation in a more recent era, less blurred by mythology?

In 1914, Germany broke the treaty of neutrality that it was responsible for guaranteeing and invaded Belgium in the attempt to reach France quickly. Every attack by Belgium and its allies was one too many. For a variety of reasons, it helped to build up a paranoid belief in the German army that they were not fighting regular forces but the ordinary people of Belgium, organized on a large scale by the Belgian government. The fear of franc-tireurs caused German soldiers to murder over 5000 civilians.<sup>2</sup> After most of the country had been conquered, the Germans maintained

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a brutal occupation for over four years. This sparked revulsion across the world, making Belgium one of the most powerful emblems in World War I. The campaign for “Poor Little Belgium” was born, which had great impact not only in the nations of the Commonwealth, Europe and the U.S., but also in Japan and South America.

German propaganda responded firstly by presenting the massacres as acts of self-defence against the civilian population’s barbarism. Secondly, the invasion was portrayed as a legitimate act through suggestions that Belgium had never planned to honour its pre-war obligations of neutrality, citing Belgian sources in an attempt to prove a pre-war “convention” between Belgium and Great Britain. Thus Germany had not broken the neutrality treaty, but rather it was abandoned by Belgium. At the same time, large parts of the German public had conceived the idea of annexing Belgium, or at least keeping it under strong German control.<sup>3</sup> A colonial regime was being considered for Belgium, because the Belgian people had once again revealed their true colours: namely their low cultural standards, considered even lower than those of its own colonial populations; indeed, below African societies in the “racial hierarchy”.<sup>4</sup> In the German view, Belgium had lost its right to sovereignty because of the alleged “Belgian cruelty” in the (fantasized) war of the franc-tireurs, because of its hypocrisy in relinquishing its neutrality while blaming Germany for not keeping its promise to guarantee that neutrality, and because of the low level of Belgian culture.

In contrast, the honour and glory of the German Reich shone brightly. Moreover, the German occupation, especially under Governor-General Moritz von Bissing, who supported far-reaching annexations, was seen as a justification for post-war German rule over Belgium. So it can be said that if Germany had won the war, Belgium would have no longer existed. The political majority in favour of the idea of incorporating or at least controlling Belgium was very powerful, whereas opposition to it was weak; even prominent Social Democrats claimed openly that it would be absurd not to move some national boundaries.<sup>5</sup>

On both sides of the conflict, gender played a crucial role in how propaganda framed and analysed these events. Sometimes it was a love story, but more often a story of sex and crime. Sometimes the propaganda was pure fantasy, at other times it was grounded in reality. Sometimes it spoke of real women as either threats or objects of desire and of real men as heroes and sissies, whereas at other times it all remained on a more abstract level, with states and cities assigned male and female characteristics.

At first, the invasion that broke Belgian neutrality was perceived in terms of gender relations by all sides. Entente propaganda built up the image of the “Rape of Belgium” through the female embodiment of the nation, in which Belgian neutrality was, as Judith Smart states, “interpreted metaphorically as her virginity” (Smart 1994: 34). In German propaganda, the invasion became on the one hand an act “which only a nation of men were worthy of”,<sup>6</sup> while on the other, it was imagined as revenge upon women who had murdered German citizens living in Belgium by throwing them into blast furnaces.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, after crossing the border, German troops, “real men” with hard bodies and “hard looks”,<sup>8</sup> saw themselves fighting an army of “chocolate soldiers”—weak, unmanly soldiers who “would melt in the sun”. Or worse, they fought irregular franc-tireurs, who used irregular guerrilla tactics that only “sissies” (*Memmen*)<sup>9</sup> used. In the German imagination these franc-tireurs were often women and young girls who used the tools of their workplace, the kitchen. The German public also personified Belgium or Belgian cities as women to be captured in a heroic fight by Germany. Later, the Belgian woman was seen by the German occupation as a potential spy and traitor due to her low morality. The German government and public were convinced that the life and sexuality of Belgian women called for German regulation.

This chapter will systematize the different levels of meaning within this gender discourse and examine, in chronological order, the appearance of feminities and masculinities in German newspapers, political, cultural and satirical magazines, in penny dreadfuls, popular dramas and on postcards. It will explore the symbolic roles played by women, such as their use to represent nations or cities. It will also clarify the perspectives from which these images were produced and reveal the self-images of the producers.

## 1 THE FEMALE BELGIAN AS FIGHTING FURY

At the start of the First World War, the Belgian woman appeared in the German public’s imagination as a Fury. She played an active role in stories of sex and crime; she was a misguided perpetrator—sometimes a lunatic, sometimes a calculating criminal. She was emblematic in narratives of Belgian cruelty and barbarism, as shown in two alleged events. First, the so-called expulsion (*Austreibung*) of German citizens living in Belgium before the German invasion and secondly, the irregular warfare of the Belgian civilian population, the franc-tireurs. The first news from the Belgian battlefield only mentioned that “even the women”<sup>10</sup> were fight-

ing. But Belgian women were quickly accused of playing a crucial role in acts of barbarism and seen as conspicuous examples of the Belgian people's particular bestiality and malice. This hegemonic analogy of women and savagery was documented in newspapers and magazines, but also in penny dreadfuls and popular dramas. The leading Catholic paper *Germania* quoted an injured soldier with the words: "The people down there in Belgium are doing just evil things to us. These are no longer women, these are wild animals."<sup>11</sup> Belgian women were described as "raging shrews",<sup>12</sup> "Furies"<sup>13</sup> and "Megaeras" (Anonym 1914: 2), who used the harmless tools of the female sphere to kill Germans. It was said that the wives of the labourers of the city of Herstal, near Liège, filled their cooking pots with hot oil and poured it over German soldiers, and that German soldiers bled to death after being stabbed by the "kitchen knife of a fanatical Belgian woman".<sup>14</sup> Belgian women were accused of executing Herculean tasks; one report stated that they incapacitated 3,000 German soldiers by pouring hot water on them.<sup>15</sup> Violent male fantasies were spelled out in real or fictitious letters from soldiers about the bestial women of Liège:

They were soaked in the blood of others and stained from top to bottom. Their bedraggled hair hung loose around their heads, their clothes consisted solely of scraps and showed their semi-naked bodies. When I looked at the woman that I just arrested, she laughed diabolically, grinning as though she were mad.<sup>16</sup>

These images of the "Fighting Fury" can be found not only in newspapers and magazines but were also visualized in songs. One classic example is the folk song *Die Soldatenkarline* from the popular drama *Die Franktireurs* by Hilmar Mückenberger.<sup>17</sup> The image of the Belgian female Fury was further propagated in news reports about fighting Belgian girls, and even included an eleven-year-old girl who killed sleeping German soldiers by "carving their eyes out using knitting needles".<sup>18</sup> This fake story was repeated by Reich Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg. When Tammy Proctor argues that "civilian" assumes a particularly feminine connotation so that it means primarily "innocent women and children" (Proctor 2010b: 4), one can also ask if this is not true in reverse as well: that civilian participation in combat can generally be seen as a "female" act. This narrative of deceitful behaviour was grounded in the contemporary hegemonic image of women and children as irrational and emotional. In this view, female emotionality is a mixed blessing: on the one hand there is the narrative of

a gracious or caring emotionality, crystallized in the concept of motherly love; on the other, female emotionality is seen as the reason for a hysterical fury which can lead to “evil deeds”. Thus women were seen as closer to animals than to men, as deficient human beings—an intellectual concept that in the nineteenth century became institutionalized as hysteria. This becomes particularly clear when examining how the many printed stories about Belgian women spoke of the factors that drove them to fight. They were primarily pictured as victims of their own biology or puppets in a male game. The term “fury” itself can be explained in two ways: the “fighting fury” was seen as giving in to a trick of her imagination and animal instincts, yet at the same time the Belgian authorities were accused of exploiting base “female” instincts by filling them with hatred of their enemies and turning them into fighters. Thus, Belgian women were seen as both perpetrators and as victims of their nature, but never as passive victims.

Belgian women’s “animal instincts” supposedly harmed those who, in the nationalistic German view, still maintained the good, pure elements of their sex and defended female honour in general: German girls and women. Narratives filled with male fantasy analogized the abused body of female Germans with the mistreated German nation. The female body represented the nation, its vulnerability standing for the wounds suffered by Germany. German soldiers were portrayed as avengers: “every German lad fighting for Germany on Belgian ground will see himself as a defender of his mistreated female fellow citizens (*Volksschwestern*)”.<sup>19</sup> German women were often described as wearing only “rags on their bodies”<sup>20</sup> or as pulled by their hair through the streets by Belgian civilians.<sup>21</sup> These reports of Belgian resistance were highly sexualized and focused on sadistic-pornographic behaviour.

Locating women outside combat served the function of showing the chivalry of men, who were not murderers or madmen who kill anything that moves but rather had control of their emotions, sparing women, the elderly and children. This demonstrated Germany’s “civilized” nature, especially in war. Moreover, German soldiers were fighting on behalf of women—for home, hearth and wife. Such “attacks on a nation’s women” have a long history of being used for war mobilization (Grayzel 1999: 50); the fight is not only for the honour and safety of the nation’s women, but for honour in general. Discourses relating to German honour and Germany’s “civilized” manners were central topics in the propaganda war against the symbolic role played by Belgium in World War I. Thus the

General-Governor of Belgium, Moritz von Bissing, was pictured as a “real man” who behaved towards the Belgians in a fatherly but strict manner.<sup>22</sup> The Belgians, according to Bissing, were “happy when someone was giving them the right orders” (Wende 1970: 35).

## 2 BELGIUM AS A FEMALE TROPHY

Belgian women were portrayed not only as breaking their gender’s code of honour by taking part in cruel combat. In patriarchal societies the weapons and, thus, the danger of women is their sexuality, so Belgian women were pictured as erotic temptresses. Therefore, Tammy Proctor is right when she emphasizes the “precarious position” of women in occupied territories, because they “were seen as ‘available’” (Proctor 2010a: 208). This “availability” can be found along a spectrum, from consensual sexual relationships, to prostitution and rape. All these “availabilities” were seen as dangerous for the occupation—and for morale at home. So it is no coincidence that the Christian guardians of public morality in Germany criticized the circulation of satirical photos, caricatures and post-cards that illustrated the “conquest” of women in the occupied territories, which was especially the case with Flemish women.<sup>23</sup> In the case of military “jokes”, the female body represented the nation, which, like Belgium, was not just occupied, but entirely swallowed.<sup>24</sup> Only “real men” could do this. It also meant that people who opposed the invasion and occupation of Belgium were told that Germany needed “real men, not old shrews of both genders”.<sup>25</sup> To annex Belgium was thus, as Prussian Minister of War Adolf Wild von Hohenborn put it, to “emasculate Belgium” (Wende 1970: 51). When conquering this female-embodied Belgium, the roles were clearly defined: the “real man” requests, enters and conquers, while the woman lets him in or is resigned to her fate. Yet if the request comes from the woman, the good German soldier, when faced with her disgraceful behaviour, will refuse in disgust.<sup>26</sup>

These examples show the explicit entanglement of gender discourses both on the front lines and on the home front in Germany. Public protest against the shame of Belgian women also related to German women at home. German women who showed “un-German behaviour”<sup>27</sup> by “approaching Belgian and French prisoners of war in an intrusive and disgusting way”<sup>28</sup> were linked to the discourse about Belgian women. This manner of de-territorializing conflicts was not uncommon in times of “*Burgfrieden*” [truce], which restricted internal political conflicts during



times of war. While reports on the cruelty of Belgium's Catholics or organized workers—the Belgian priest or the Belgian worker were major icons of the *frank-tireur* for the German public—filled the purpose of saying things that were forbidden under the *Burgfrieden* regime, this was not the case regarding Belgian women—in the arena of gender, anything was allowed. The *Burgfrieden* did not apply to gender struggles, even when members of the German women's movement occasionally demanded this peace for their movement as well.<sup>29</sup> Yet at the same time, both the bourgeois and social democratic women's movements promoted images of the good and decent German women who were “worthy of their name”.<sup>30</sup> Thus, metaphorically, women's movements also contributed to the expulsion of “bad women” from the nation. The national appeal to morality was also strongly supported within the Social Democratic Party, as can be seen in a diary entry of its prominent right-wing member Eduard David, who applauded physical attacks on women who tried to help prisoners of war because such behaviour showed “a lack of patriotic morality” (Miller and Erich 1966: 20).

### 3 TO ANNEX IS TO LOVE

The representation of Belgian women as a trophy can only be analysed against the background of the desire of a large part of the German public to possess Belgium. Fictional works also confirm Theweleit's aforementioned thesis that annexation can be metaphorized as a love story in which the woman is portrayed as passive but not cruel or immoral. The popular writer Ludwig Thoma presented Belgian annexation as a mating ritual in the conservative satirical magazine *Simplicissimus*. Here the yet unoccupied city of Antwerp was portrayed as a proud maiden (“stolze Magd”) who should let in her suitor, the German troops, after she recognized that her resistance made no sense.<sup>31</sup> But these kinds of stories were primarily found in penny dreadfuls, a good example being Josephine Schade-Hädicke's *Belgische Tücke* (*Belgian Malice*) of 1915. This small book was published as part of the successful series *Krieg und Liebe* (*War and Love*). The plot is simple: before the war, an evil Belgian miller, described as a “stereotypical” Belgian (*Stockbelgier*) (Schade-Hädicke 1915: 8), lives with his kind-hearted daughter Jeanne and their loyal, hard-working German farmhand Paul Werner in a small unnamed Belgian town. Jeanne is half-Dutch and symbolizes the “Self within the Other”—the projection of one group's “own” characteristics and desires onto a representative

“other”; in the two dozen penny dreadfuls analysed for this chapter, this role is mostly filled by women. She and Paul Werner fall in love, but Jeanne’s father has other plans: he wants her to marry Jules, who is a mix of stereotypically English and French characteristics—he dresses like a dandy (*geckenhaft*) (ibid.: 32) but is also driven by a desire for money.<sup>32</sup> When war breaks out and the villagers attack the German citizens who live there, Jeanne recognizes their cruelty: she ‘is in her heart no longer a Belgian anymore’ and wants to become a German citizen (ibid.: 57). As the father and the villagers plot to fight against the invading German troops, Jeanne betrays the *franc-tireurs*’ plans. She finally goes with Paul Werner to Germany, to ‘this haven of peace’, hoping fervently that ‘her new fatherland, where men so trustworthy, so loyal and so brave, will win this war’ (ibid.: 96).

According to Judith Smart, the fairy-tale form ‘confronts its audience with basic human dilemmas in a simplified, essential narrative peopled with archetypal and polarised characters which represent moral choices between good and evil, right and wrong’ (Smart 1994: 32). Jeanne and Paul Werner’s tale of genuine love can therefore be easily decoded. The “Self within the Other” is incarnate in the graceful woman. She is constructed as partly active, partly passive, but in desperate need of being rescued—rescued to become part of what is noble, of Germany. But, like Pocahontas, the noble savage also has ‘two nations in her lap’ (Theweleit 1999: 189); she needs to be rescued but also saves others. It is surprising that the “Flemish question” plays no role in the penny dreadfuls examined; Jeanne is not Flemish but half-Dutch, and longs to be Paul Werner’s wife, meaning that she too will become a part of Germany. Yet her hopes are destroyed by two characters: her father, a Walloon, and Jules—a mix of the French stereotypes of over-sophistication and cosmopolitanism and the stereotypes of shallowness and Mammon that were normally associated with Britain. Both the British and the French had been plotting against Germany before the war—thus confirming the German notion that Belgium had had no intention of remaining neutral. Germany’s invasion of Belgium was thus seen as a justified military act, even more so once Belgium had become the symbol of Germany’s injustice. Paul Werner represents the German self-image of a virtuous but simple “deutscher Michel”, and when Jeanne and Paul Werner eventually get married, in spite of all opposition, the decent part of Belgium falls into the arms of the biggest source of decency in the world, Germany, and they thus become one.

#### 4 SPIES AND FALLEN WOMEN: THE FEMALE BELGIAN AS A THREAT

As well as the penny dreadfuls, dramas and some kinds of fiction portrayed Belgian women as a threat. They were a favourite subject in debates over national security, for example in the semi-official news agency *Wolffsche Telegraphen Bureau*, which stated that the imprisonment of alleged female Belgian spies should serve as a warning to all Belgian women.<sup>33</sup> It can be safely assumed that there was a wide spy network in Belgium in World War I, in which women played a crucial role (Proctor 2003).<sup>34</sup> But for the German general public, these women were primarily depicted as puppets in a male game. Only occasionally were female spies in Belgium named: alongside the British nurse Edith Cavell, the sole Belgian female spy to become well-known, mainly after the war, was Gabrielle Petit, who was executed in 1916.<sup>35</sup> The focus on Cavell was largely a result of Entente propaganda and confirmed the German perception of a Belgian pre-war intent to side with the Entente. However, whereas Petit was pictured in a German book of 1929 as a ‘master female spy’ (de Schaepdrijver and Petit 2015: 11), Cavell was generally portrayed in Entente propaganda as a passive victim, not a combatant (ibid.: 55). Yet to the German public Cavell was pictured as the ‘soul of the spy network’ (Proctor 2010a: 211) — notably not the head. The famous German journalist Maximilian Harden saw hers as a patriotically driven act, which would have been praised by ‘Kleist und Arndt, Schill und Yorck’.<sup>36</sup> But like all the other newspapers, he also justified the death penalty.

The German public’s fear of female spying activities drifted into the sexual arena, especially since the spread of sexually transmitted diseases by Belgian sex-workers was seen as a planned subversive act by spies (Daniel 1989: 142). The fact that Brussels was ‘the centre of rear-echelon prostitution at the western front’ (ibid.: 140; see also Majerus 2006: 10) led to much debate in the Reich, as well as in the Belgian civil and military administration. Books such as Alexis Spingard’s *Clarissa. Aus dunklen Häusern Belgiens* (*Clarissa from Belgium’s Dark Houses*) of 1915 were well advertised in German newspapers and had high print runs,<sup>37</sup> and soldiers reported an unprecedented and complete lack of inhibition among the prostitutes in Brussels<sup>38</sup> (Fig. 4.1).

After prostitution and low morality in Brussels became a public concern in Germany, Governor-General Bissing stated that prostitution was a valuable form of recreation for front-line officers (Majerus 2006: 10), but that

Fig. 4.1 Front cover of Splingard's *Clarissa from Belgium's Dark Houses*



he had also tried to direct this into regulated channels. These debates were always linked to debates at home: newspapers asked readers to report German women who publically behaved like sex-workers in an ostentatious and provocative way, so as to 'offend the moral senses of their compatriots'. Short-term imprisonment awaited such women.<sup>39</sup> Especially in times of war 'the health of the nation (*Volksgesundheit*) needed firm efforts to combat the dangers of prostitution and public displays of immorality'.<sup>40</sup> The discourse about immorality was mainly directed towards women. An article in *Wehr*, the journal of the pre-fascist *Deutscher Wehrverein* (German Army League), stated that it was to be welcomed when a woman, 'at least in daytime', could be safe in German cities when surrounded by men who may find her attractive. But she should 'behave with restraint and show awareness that this is only possible because the men had reached an agreement among themselves to protect her'.<sup>41</sup>

## 5 CONCLUSION

This essay has demonstrated the diversity and complexity of the gender discourse about Belgium in German newspapers, political, cultural and satirical magazines, penny dreadfuls and plays, and on postcards. Christa Hämmerle et al. speak of separating the ‘disparate functionalities and practices of gender in total war’ from ‘its mainly one-dimensional use for propagandistic, political, and war-affirming purposes’ (Hämmerle et al. 2014: 6), and German public discourse about Belgium during the First World War is clearly an example of this. The woman was not one-dimensional and not merely passive; she was depicted as active, immoral and evil. Women should be passive models of womanhood and regulations should be put in place to keep them so.

For Germany to win the propaganda war, the Reich needed to fight the Entente image of “Poor little Belgium” by finding counter examples and revealing Belgium’s “true” face to the world. To have power and authority on a military level alone was not enough; “soft” power was also required, and this played out especially in the area of gender. On the one hand it was necessary to show that the Belgian woman was not a victim but a cruel and immoral perpetrator, who therefore lost all of her “natural” rights. Punishing such women thus did not make the German soldiers perpetrators; rather they were heroic in their civil attitude, moderation and manly discipline (*Manneszucht*), only taking harsh action against the civilian population when this became necessary. German actions against the Belgian people were depicted as vital, and resulting from the hypocrisy of the Belgian state and the treachery of its women. Reprisals were essential for German survival because of the dangerous sexuality of Belgian women: sex-workers in particular were responsible for thinning the ranks of German soldiers through deliberate transmitting of venereal diseases. Belgian men were accused of ultimately standing behind such plots, but accounts alternated between narratives of female master criminals and puppets whose strings were pulled by men. It was therefore vital to secure social order within the occupied territory through symbolic representations of hierarchy.

Propagandistic imagery, with women at its core, played a crucial role in the politics of the First World War. Gendered representations of nations both targeted Belgian women on a meta-level and set standards of morality for all women; they were thus an unmistakable warning for German women too. In other arenas, mostly in fiction, literature and satirical productions, one also finds attempts to paint Belgian annexation as a love story, where the woman is courted, conquered and married. At least in the

world of fiction, there could be a harmonious ending. The different dimensions of meaning and function were interwoven and overlapping, thus the gender discourse in German public and propaganda was not one-dimensional but polyphonic. There were many stories, but the narrative of female threat was primary and women's behaviour came to symbolize Belgian savagery. This could be could only be mastered by one figure: the German man. The female threat of furies, spies and fallen women was juxtaposed to an equal and opposite male image, one of 'great personality, with a deep and exceptionally well-trained mind, illuminated, yes, alight, ablaze, with an excessively strong character', one that was part of an 'impe-riously disciplined body' (le Seur 1917: 4).<sup>42</sup>

### Newspaper and Magazines

*Allgemeine Rundschau, Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung, Deutsche Tageszeitung, Frau der Gegenwart, Germania, Hamburgischer Correspondent, Hannoverscher Courier, Hilfe, Jugend, Kladderadatsch, Münchner Neueste Nachrichten, National-Zeitung, Neue Rundschau, Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, Simplicissimus, Süddeutsche Monatshefte, Ulk, Vorwärts, Vossische Zeitung, Wehr, Zukunft.*

### NOTES

1. On the role of the "Pocahontas"-myth in the U.S.A. in World War I see Theweleit (1999). This analyses the psyche of German pre-fascist paramilitaries after the First World War.
2. See for details Alan Kramer and John Horne (2001). Towards the end of 2017 and after this text had been finalized, a debate about these events took place, starting from a new publication by Ulrich Keller titled *Schuldfragen. Belgischer Untergrundkrieg und deutsche Vergeltung im August 1914* (2017). In his book Keller argues that there were massive civil wars in Belgium in 1914 and insinuates this was organized by the Belgian state. This viewpoint was challenged by Alan Kramer and John Horne in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1 March 2018, [www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/massaker-in-belgien-im-ersten-weltkrieg-15472194.html](http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/massaker-in-belgien-im-ersten-weltkrieg-15472194.html)
3. See Bischoff 2018.
4. The Belgians were seen as "savages" (*Frankfurter Zeitung*, printed in *Germania*, 18. 8. 1914 (Evening Issue), No. 374). Fighting against them would be like fighting against "negroes" (*Kölnische Zeitung*, printed in *Germania*, 11. 8. 1914 (Evening issue), No. 362 and *Münchner Neueste*

- Nachrichten*, 13. 8. 1914 (Pre-Evening Issue), No. 411. See also Sobich and Bischoff (2015: 250 f).
5. See Scheidemann 1916. See also Konrad Haenisch in *Hamburger Echo*, reproduced in CVS of 8.6.1915, Nr. 129.
  6. *Vossische Zeitung*, 26.8.1914 (Evening Issue), No. 432.
  7. See *Germania*, 15.8.1914 (Evening Issue), No. 370 and *Hannoverscher Courier*, 15.8.1914 (Evening Issue), No. 31287.
  8. For this “hard look” in Prussian military culture, see Hull (2005: 104 f).
  9. For example in the penny dreadful by Robert Heymann (1914), *Sturmnacht in Loewen. Der Weltkrieg 1914*, No. 8, p. 16. On the construction of maleness in the Belgian army, see Benvindo (2005: 109 ff). For the relation of male self-perception and female images of the enemy, see Horne (2004: 29ff).
  10. See for example one of the leading liberal papers, *Vossische Zeitung*, 11.8.1914 (Morning Issue), No. 402.
  11. *Germania*, 23.8.1914 (Morning Issue), No. 383.
  12. *Vossische Zeitung*, 28.8.1914 (Evening Issue), No. 436.
  13. Adolf von Hildebrand in *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*, October 1914, p. 122.
  14. *Kölnische Zeitung*, printed in *Germania*, 11.8.1914 (Evening Issue), No. 362 and *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, 13.8.1914 (Evening Issue), No. 411.
  15. *Germania*, 1.10.1914 (Evening Issue), No. 450. The paper quoted a British family paper called *The Sphere*. For a similar story, see Friedrich Naumann in *Hilfe*, 3.9.1914, No. 36, p. 574.
  16. Printed in *Neue Rundschau*, November 1914, quoted in Ulrich 1997: 122.
  17. See [www.bildpostkarten.uni-osnabrueck.de/displayimage.php?pid=1262&fullsize=1](http://www.bildpostkarten.uni-osnabrueck.de/displayimage.php?pid=1262&fullsize=1) (23.5.2016).
  18. *Hamburgischer Correspondent*, quoted in Kramer and Horne (2001: 167).
  19. *Deutsche Zeitung*, reprinted in *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 9.8.1914 (First Issue), No. 185.
  20. *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, 8.8.1914 (Evening Issue), No. 402.
  21. See *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, 13.8.1914 (Evening Issue), No. 411; *Kölnische Zeitung*, reprinted in *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, 19.8.1914 (Evening Issue), No. 422 and *Allgemeine Rundschau*, 22.8.1914, No. 34, p. 599.
  22. *Vorwärts*, 29.7.1915, No. 207.
  23. *Allgemeine Rundschau*, 22.4.1916, No. 16, p. 284. Robert I. Nelson (2011), *German Soldier Newspapers of the First World War*, p. 178, refers to the images of the Belgian woman.
  24. See *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 7.2.1915, No. 6, p. 70 and *Ulk*, 2.6.1916, No. 22, p. 170.
  25. See *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, 27.10.1914 (Evening Issue), No. 546.



26. See *National-Zeitung*, 29.8.1914, No. 202.
27. *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, 18.8.1914 (Evening Issue), No. 420.
28. *Jugend*, 19.8.1914, No. 34, p. 1093.
29. In *Frau des Ostens*, special issue of *Frau der Gegenwart*, Marie Wegner claimed a “Burgfrieden” for women (*Frau der Gegenwart*, 1.7.1915, No. 19, pp. 137 ff.).
30. *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, 18.8.1914 (Eve Issue), No. 420.
31. Ludwig Thoma in *Simplicissimus*, 31.3.1915, No. 53, p. 37, similarly see Hermann Küchling in the *Hannoverscher Courier*, 14.8.1914 (Morning Issue), No. 31284.
32. These negative images of Belgium derived from anti-British, anti-French and anti-Russian images, therefore I call it an intentional “mosaic stereotype”. For an extended treatment of this category see Bischoff (2016b: 55–65).
33. *Wolffsche Telegraphen Bureau*, printed in *Vorwärts*, 4.6.1915, No. 152.
34. See Tammy Proctor (2003), *Female Intelligence. Women and Espionage in the First World War*.
35. See Sophie de Schaepdrijver and Gabrielle Petit (2015), *The Death and Life of a Female Spy in the First World War*, p. 11.
36. Maximilian Harden in *Zukunft*, 20.11.1915, No. 8, p. 230 ff.
37. See the advertisement in *Kladderadatsch*, 10.1.1915, No. 2, Second Supplement, p. 31.
38. See *Vorwärts*, 14.6.1918, No. 161.
39. *National-Zeitung*, 15.8.1914, No. 191.
40. *Germania*, 20.8.1914 (Evening Issue), No. 378.
41. *Wehr*, November 1914, No. 11/12, p. 11.
42. From the eulogy given by the Bruxelles military garrison’s Protestant pastor Paul le Seur at the funeral of General-Governor of Belgium Moritz von Bissing on 20.4.1917.

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## CHAPTER 5

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# The Cultural Mobilization of Language and Race During the First World War: The Interaction Between Dutch and Belgian Intellectuals in Response to the German *Flamenpolitik*

*Tessa Lobbes*

## 1 THE LOW COUNTRIES AS A BATTLEGROUND FOR RACE AND LANGUAGE

In the summer of 1915, the Dutch poet Albert Verwey published his article “Vlaanderen-België-Nederland” [Flanders-Belgium-Netherlands] in which he discussed how in the first two years of the First World War the German occupation of Belgium and in consequence the increasing German influence in Europe generally, immediately affected his home country, the neutral Netherlands. “For the Netherlands, it is imperative that the freer spirit of Western Europe is not outshone by German discipline”, he stated, “that these coastal countries are not cut off from Latin civilization, nor directed against the Anglo-Saxon. (...) Despite our love for Germany,

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**Fig. 5.1** *De Kroniek*.  
*Maandblad voor Noord  
 en Zuidnederland*. [*The  
 Chronicle*. Monthly  
 Journal for Northern  
 and Southern  
 Netherlands], Kerstmis  
 1915



despite the desirability that Flanders will be Flemish and not Walloon, we would consider it to be disastrous if Germany becomes the master of Western Europe” (Verwey 1915: 211) (Fig. 5.1).<sup>1</sup>

Like many other intellectuals well beyond the Netherlands, Verwey interpreted the war as a clash of cultures or civilizations; he observed a struggle between French or “Latin” civilization and the German “*Kultur*” which threatened cultural dominance over the Low Countries. This interpretation was generally fed by a racialized world view. The war was often defined as a clash between the German and the French races, which were regarded as having distinct linguistic, cultural and racial characteristics. This perception of the war as a clash of cultures was also fuelled by an omnipresent desire of intellectuals for redemption, hoping that the war—and the victory of a cherished culture—could bring purification (Stromberg 1982: 39–60; Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker 2002: 156–214; Buelens 2015: 21–30).

The racial and cultural interpretation of the war also put pressure upon neutral intellectuals to take sides. They were eager to discuss which international cultural orientation would be most beneficial for their own nation (Sturfelt 2012). Dutch culture, according to Verwey, benefitted greatly from balanced French and German cultural influences. Yet this balance seemed to be endangered by the possible “Germanization” of the Low Countries. German propagandists used the assumed linguistic, cultural and racial affinities between the Belgian Flemish, the Dutch and the

Germans—all speakers of Germanic languages—to bring them closer together. These German activities were part of the notorious German cultural propaganda programme known as the *Flamenpolitik* [Flemish Policy] (Wils 2014: 41–58).

The German exploitation of race and language as propaganda tools most directly caused the involvement of the Dutch, albeit inhabitants of a neutral nation, in the war and, more specifically, in the language conflict of neighbouring Belgium. During the war, the language issues in Belgium developed into a matter of international concern. The Dutch-speaking Flemish, with whom the Dutch shared their language, had been struggling for decades to obtain more linguistic autonomy within a Belgian state, which was predominantly ruled by a French-speaking elite. After the German invasion of Belgium on 4th August 1914, German officials secretly started to develop a *Flamenpolitik*, in which they closely intertwined the future of Belgium and the Netherlands (Wils 2014: 44–46, 152–161). The German empire had far-reaching ambitions in the Low Countries in their entirety. The main German war aim in Western Europe was the integration of the Netherlands and Belgium into a German *Mitteleuropa* (Middle Europe). Therefore, this *Flamenpolitik* was not only aimed at Belgium, but also at the Netherlands.

German propaganda also capitalized on Flemish grievances by inciting Flemish intellectuals in particular to rebel against the francophone Belgian state. In Ghent, the Germans decided to found the first Dutch-speaking university in December 1915, and the administrative division of Belgium resulted in Flemish autonomy by March 1917. These measures had never before been an option for the Belgian government, which was in exile in Le Havre, France. German officials in Flanders and in the Netherlands also aimed at bringing the Flemish and the Dutch closer together culturally and ideologically, as some members of the Flemish Movement, such as the most popular poet René de Clercq, saw their Dutch “linguistic brothers” as partners in their battle against the “Romanization” of Flanders. German officials were convinced that this policy would also flatter the Dutch, as they were considered to be sensitive to the suppression of fellow Dutch-speakers in Belgium. In the end, the *Flamenpolitik* had to pave the way for a Dutch and Belgian acceptance of the German undermining of the Belgian state and the growing German influence in the Low Countries (Wils 2014: 45, 193–299).

The *Flamenpolitik* did not stand alone; it was part of a secret and truly global “German Revolutionary Programme” to stimulate uprisings among

oppressed minorities and colonized peoples in the Allies' empires. It contained, among other things, plans to stir revolt among the Irish, the British Indians, the South African Boers, the Polish, the Algerians and the Flemish in order to expand German influence globally (Strachan 2003: 65–95; Jenkins 2013). As in Flanders, German officials equally used the Dutch affinities of the Afrikaners, distant descendants from Dutch settlers, to fight British rule in South Africa (Zajas 2015). Such German strategies had in the past fallen on fertile ground. The Boer Wars at the turn of the century had provoked a remarkable wave of nationalism among Dutch intellectuals. Their defence of the Afrikaner against “perfidious Albion” had strengthened their belief in a certain kinship between Dutch-speakers (Kuitenbrouwer 2012).

Albert Verwey was one of those Dutch intellectuals who cherished feelings of kinship with the Flemish and Afrikaners, whom he called “linguistic brothers”. In his pre-war poetry and essays, Verwey had demonstrated his commitment to their cultural and political emancipation (Lobbès and Ham 2016). The First World War increasingly drew his attention to the Flemish struggle. In his article “Flanders-Belgium-Holland”, Verwey pointed out that he longed for a “Flemish Flanders”, but he explicitly rejected any German intervention in Flemish affairs and condemned the support of some Flemish and Dutch intellectuals for the German *Flamenpolitik*. The Flemish cause, Verwey stated, could only be solved within Belgium and by the Belgians themselves. The Dutch poet thus defended the restoration of Belgium and rejected any foreign intrusion in internal affairs. His greatest fear was that the “Germanization” of Flanders would mark the beginning of a German era, not only in Belgium but also in the Netherlands. Verwey’s warm feelings of linguistic and racial kinship had clearly not shaken his deep-rooted belief in the value of the nation. The Dutch nation, according to Verwey, had a specific character. He believed its nationhood to stem from a mix of diverse international influences and specific national traits (Verwey 1915: 211; Tollebeek 2010).

As the Netherlands played a key role in the German plans for a new world in Western Europe, the Allied powers launched a counter-propaganda campaign in the Netherlands, in which they promoted their outspoken preference for the status quo in the Low Countries, namely a restored Belgium and an independent Dutch nation. And the Allies equally used the idea of cultural affiliation to attract Belgian and Dutch intellectuals (De Waele 2002). The Dutch and the Belgian cause were closely intertwined in

all belligerent schemes. Yet since their separation in 1830, when Belgium released itself from the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Dutch–Belgian relations had been deeply troubled, especially because of a lingering Belgian expansionism which threatened Dutch territory, and because of Dutch feelings of resentment over Belgian independence. Van Tuyll van Serooskerken (2016) pertinently characterizes these two countries as “far away neighbours”.

On a cultural level, interactions between generally less-educated Flemish and well-educated Dutch intellectuals often testified to unbalanced power relations. Since the end of the nineteenth century, contact between Flemish and Dutch writers had been increasing, while complaints about mutual incomprehension never disappeared. The rapprochement went hand in hand with the strong desire to remain autonomous. Dutch intellectuals such as Verwey supported the Flemish emancipation, but many others considered it to be a chiefly internal Belgian matter, and this disappointed Flemish militants (Verbruggen and Vandevoorde 2006: 223–228). In August 1914, the German invasion of Belgium forced Belgium and the Netherlands to focus on one another again, if only because no less than one million Belgian refugees fled to the Netherlands. Among them were bilinguals, some French-speaking Belgians but mainly Dutch-speaking Belgians who brought their linguistic demands with them. At the same time, the mental distance between these two neighbours was substantial: the illegally invaded Belgium was fighting the enemy, while the neutral Dutch government tried its utmost to stay out of the conflict.

Nevertheless, the German invasion of Belgium was beyond all doubt the main event that tied Dutch intellectuals to the war. Some of them, including Verwey, sided with the Dutch government and believed that only a strict neutrality would prevent a Belgian scenario, namely a German invasion. This decision to remain aloof enraged many Belgians (Van Parys 2008: 462–463). Simultaneously, a large number of Dutch intellectuals felt attracted to the Allies, rejected neutrality and adopted an “anti-German” stance. The great indignation over Belgium’s fate played a crucial role in this position. The famous internationalist Dutch writer Frederik Van Eeden abhorred the German violation of international law and the rumours of atrocities. In November 1914 he decided to assist the French Embassy in The Hague with their anti-German propaganda, as did the Dutch cartoonist Louis Raemaekers. The latter toured Allied countries with his iconic drawings of German “barbarism” and the Belgian martyr.

A flood of literary, artistic and musical expressions of sympathy hailing the courageous Belgian people and King Albert testifies to the general pro-Belgian atmosphere in the Netherlands at the beginning of the war. In these homages, Dutch intellectuals expressed their hope that Belgium would soon be liberated and restored. A smaller number of conservative Dutch intellectuals defended the German invasion of Belgium and represented a “pro-German” stance. Most of them, such as the poet Geerten Gossaert, pseudonym of Frederik Carel Gerretson, were radical supporters of the Flemish movement. They applauded a “Great-Netherlandish” ideal and tried to strengthen cultural, economic and political ties between the Dutch and the Flemish, as they not only spoke the same language but, in their opinion, also shared blood ties. (Tames 2006: 58–97; Lobbes forthcoming).

Belgium thus had a mobilizing effect on Dutch intellectuals, but it equally and immediately divided them. The German *Flamenpolitik*, starting in August 1914, would sow even more discord. In this chapter, the very divergent Dutch responses to the German *Flamenpolitik* in 1915 and 1916 are examined, when Dutch intellectuals were growing increasingly aware of this secret German strategy. The Dutch responses went hand in hand with the formation of diverse alliances between Dutch intellectuals and Belgian refugees, coalitions that in turn were assisted, sometimes covertly, by the belligerent powers.

In existing historiography, historians of wartime Belgium have tended to focus on those pro-German Dutch intellectuals who influenced Flemish activism, while leaving out other Dutch responses to the German *Flamenpolitik*. This focus has led to the exaggeration of the pro-German attitude of the Netherlands in its entirety and a marginalization of other positions. Historians have taken little account of the fact that Dutch society became deeply divided into pro-German, anti-German, neutral and pacifist positions, to which divergent attitudes towards the German *Flamenpolitik* were connected.<sup>2</sup> Research on the First World War in the Netherlands has thus paid little or no attention to the diverse and complicated contacts between Dutch and Belgian intellectuals.<sup>3</sup> This example of national “myopia” can be overcome by examining the interaction between Dutch, Belgian and belligerent intellectuals and officials as a response to the *Flamenpolitik*. This chapter examines three types of alliance: one pro-German, one pro-French and a third type that was simultaneously pro-Belgian and pro-Flemish.<sup>4</sup>



## 2 THE PRO-GERMAN ALLIANCE AND GREAT-NETHERLANDISH KINSHIP

The best-known Dutch response to the *Flamenpolitik* was the rise of the alliance between the pro-German Dutch intellectuals, the German officials and the radical Flemish activists who jointly executed this German policy. The 31-year-old Frederik Carel Gerretson, a respected poet, journalist and historian, played a major role in this alliance. As a conservative Protestant, he was the secretary and advisor to like-minded Dutch politicians, and his stay in Brussels in 1910 had turned him into a radical Flemish activist. In a letter in January 1915, Gerretson claimed that “the German violation of law was provoked by a historical debt of Belgium” and considered bilingual Belgium as an artificial “mixed culture” including Germanic Flemish and Romance Walloons. He welcomed the German invasion in Belgium as an opportunity to liberate the Flemish from the yoke of Romanization and bring them closer to their linguistic brothers, the Dutch and the Germans.<sup>5</sup>

In his essays, for example *Het Nederlandsche standpunt* [The Dutch Position] published in 1915, Gerretson argued that the “Nederlandsche stam”<sup>6</sup> exceeded the value of the Belgian and the Dutch nation. He saw the “Flemish Dutch”, the “Dutch in Holland” and the “Afrikaner Dutch” as exponents of the same Dutch “tribe”. In 1915, however, Gerretson had to admit that many members of the Dutch kin were fighting the wrong fight. After all, most Flemish soldiers were trying to restore Belgium and many Boer soldiers served the British Empire, while the South African and Dutch states would only continue, according to Gerretson, to suppress “our mother tongue” after the war. His Dutch compatriots were also driven off course, as the “pernicious cancer of neutrality” had weakened them, as most Dutch desired to see Belgium restored (Gerretson 1915a: 7, 73–75).

For Gerretson, the true “Dutch interest” lay in the undermining of the Belgian state and the reunion of the Flemish with the Dutch, recalling the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1815. Yet Gerretson’s plans involved an even greater role for the Dutch kinsmen. The cultural and political strengthening of the Dutch-speakers had to result into a rapprochement with the related “Germanic family of people”, while preserving their “specific nature”. An integrated Flanders and Netherlands could then, as part of the German empire, serve as an anti-French and anti-English bulwark and protect Dutch and German interests in Western Europe. Gerretson’s

plans fitted in well with the German war strategy. As a true Messiah, he considered it his task to bring the ‘Belgicized Flemish’ and the ‘neutralized Dutch’ back to the straight and narrow path. And he would do this, in all secrecy, with German support (Gerretson 1915a, b: 10, 16).

In 1915, the envoy of the German Embassy in The Hague, Richard von Kühlmann, who was responsible for the *Flamenpolitik* in the Netherlands, described Gerretson as his most useful ‘Great-Netherlandish advisor’.<sup>7</sup> In 1915, Gerretson and von Kühlmann were particularly occupied with finding a German ‘solution’ for Belgium that would be acceptable to Dutch public opinion. This turned out to be a very thorny problem. In October 1915, von Kühlmann finally proposed a ‘gemässigte Holländische *Flamenpolitik*’ [a moderate Dutch *Flamenpolitik*] to the German Chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg. Its moderation was to be found in von Kühlmann’s willingness to remove every imperialist touch from German war politics in Belgium. Von Kühlmann was thus diametrically opposed to hardliners, such as Baron von Bissing, who regularly pleaded for a direct German annexation of (parts of) Belgium during the war (Wils 1996: 272–275).<sup>8</sup>

Von Kühlmann’s reorientation of the *Flamenpolitik* was a response to the difficulties he experienced in the Netherlands. Since his appointment in The Hague in May 1915, the envoy regularly reported to Berlin that the Dutch continuously stressed their ‘unique’ national character and favoured the restoration of Belgium. ‘Holland [wird] im ganzen nur von einem Gedanken und nur von einer Furcht beherrscht’ [Holland is generally dominated by only idea and only one fear], von Kühlmann wrote to von Bethmann Hollweg, namely that:

(...) die Unabhängigkeit des Landes könne als Folge dieses gewaltigen Völkerringens in die Brüche gehen. Die nervöse Sorge um das künftige Schicksal Belgiens ist in ihrer Stärke nur so zu verstehen, dass die Holländer das endgültige Geschick Belgiens für untrennbar verknüpft erachten mit der Zukunft Hollands. [(...) that the nation’s independence could be shattered as a result of this great conflict between peoples of different heritage. The anxious fretting over Belgium’s future can only be understood within the context of the Dutch view of Belgium’s eventual fate as inextricably bound with their own.] (translation F. Rash)<sup>9</sup>

In these reports, von Kühlmann was thus stressing the Dutch obsession with information about German expansionist plans for the Low Countries.

Von Kühlmann and Gerretson therefore argued that it would be better to publicly strive for the restoration of a neutralized Belgium rather than spreading deterrent annexationist demands. At the same time, they would support the establishment of Flemish autonomy. The proposal of restoration responded to the widespread Dutch fear that its closest neighbour, if fragmented, would become a plaything in foreign hands. Flemish self-governance was thus considered a means of ensuring German influence in Flanders. Von Kühlmann and Gerretson clearly used this proposal as a ruse to turn the patriotic Flemish against the Belgian state, as they knew that a demand for Flemish autonomy was unacceptable to the Belgian government (Vanacker 1991: 63–69; Wils 1996: 272–275).<sup>10</sup> Ironically, the Belgians themselves were also very helpful to German propaganda. In the summer of 1915, when rumours about Belgian expansionist claims resurfaced—mostly supported by radical pro-French francophone Belgian journalists and politicians, virtually all of whom were in exile—the pro-German alliance eagerly exploited these threats in order to frame francophone Belgium as an enemy of the Dutch. In cooperation with German officials, the Flemish militant Léo Picard anonymously published his book, *La Belgique au tournant de son histoire* (1916), in which Belgian expansionist ambitions were defended.<sup>11</sup>

Frederik Carel Gerretson used different strategies to influence the Flemish and Dutch public opinion. In May 1915, he staged a coup on the Flemish newspaper *De Vlaamsche Stem* [*The Flemish Voice*], printed in Amsterdam. Here, most respected members of the Flemish Movement, such as the Catholic politician Frans van Cauwelaert and the writer Cyriel Buysse, had called upon the Flemish to remain patriotically Belgian and to postpone linguistic demands until after the war. Gerretson amassed the majority of the newspaper's shares, secretly using von Kühlmann's official financial support. The coup empowered Gerretson to turn this Flemish newspaper against Belgium. He replaced the pro-Belgian editorial staff with radical Flemish activists, such as the poet René de Clercq, who had turned his back upon the Belgian nation in the course of 1915.<sup>12</sup> Armed with German money, Gerretson founded another political-cultural periodical in the autumn of 1915, *Dietsche Stemmen. Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsche Stambelangen* [*Dutch Voices. Journal for Dutch Racial Interests*]. A mixed Flemish, Dutch and Afrikaner editorial board tried to stimulate the rapprochement of Dutch kinsmen. In articles about Holland, Flemish autonomy and the establishment of a Dutch-speaking university in Ghent were promoted. De Clercq's poems, such as "Aan Koning

Albert” [To King Albert], equally reflected these concerns, which he expressed during his German-sponsored tours in Flanders and the Netherlands (de Clercq 1915; Gerretson 1915b; van Es 1916: 412–439).

As the example of de Clercq indicates, von Kühlmann cherished cultural propaganda. The promotion of reciprocal cultural exchange, he believed, would be more likely to encourage political rapprochement than the distribution of military pamphlets.<sup>13</sup> Von Kühlmann was eager to diminish the French cultural orientation of many Dutch-speaking intellectuals, and promote a more “natural” direction towards Germany (van den Berg 2007). He supported large translation projects of, for example, the German publishing house Insel Verlag. In consultation with the German Foreign Office, Insel Verlag invited the most famous Flemish and Dutch writers to have their works translated into German.<sup>14</sup> These authors found themselves in a difficult position, as this project put their ideological principles at odds with their professional and literary ambitions to secure prestigious translations and thus gain access to the German market. In the end, Insel Verlag mainly focused on Flemish authors and translated only a few Dutch writers during the war. One of them was Albert Verwey. His self-proclaimed neutrality clearly did not prevent him from participating in a German project. Yet in his correspondence and articles, Verwey never testified to any allegiance to the *Flamenpolitik*, and in an attempt to keep his distance from the propaganda project, he insisted on being published separately from any series dedicated to Dutch-speaking authors. Verwey probably interpreted this collaboration as a way to reconnect with his German literary friends and to be finally translated into German, as the war had obstructed his pre-war contract with another German editor (Verwey 1917).<sup>15</sup>

The sheer hard work of the pro-German alliance to create their ideal community of “*Stammverwandte*” [kinsfolk] had limited impact in the Netherlands and was widely criticized. The German *Flamenpolitik* mobilized only a minority of very conservative Dutch intellectuals, such as the professor in state law Valckenier Kips and the former prime minister Abraham Kuyper, the former leader of the Dutch Anti-Revolutionary Party, whose involvement in the pro-German alliance probably represented von Kühlmann’s greatest success. Pro-German Dutch intellectuals, such as Frederik Carel Gerretson, did have a serious impact on Flemish activism, but in the end only a small number of radical Flemish activists joined the pro-German alliance, and most Flemish intellectuals remained

Belgian patriots (Vrints 2002: 51–56; Wils 2014: 149–161). In May 1916, von Kühlmann decided to postpone the establishment of a German-Dutch cultural society until after the war, since he found himself unable to mobilize enough respected pro-German Dutch intellectuals.<sup>16</sup> The limited Dutch support for Flemish autonomy also disappointed the famous leftist and modernist Flemish poet Paul van Ostaïjen. Referring to their fight against southern Spanish and French enemies in the past, his poem “Aan de Noord-Nederlanders” [To the Inhabitants of the Northern Netherlands] expressed the hope that the Dutch would soon realize that their true interests were to be found in the creation of an autonomous Flanders. “Flanders is the Dutch bulwark/Dutchmen, if you want to repulse the evil/put yourself to work (...)” (quoted in De Ridder 2009: 468–469).

In 1915 and 1916, however, the German *Flamenpolitik* generally created the opposite effect in the Netherlands. It provoked the rise of an anti-German inspired Dutch nationalism and it strengthened the pro-Belgian mood among many Dutch intellectuals. The ideals of the pro-German alliance were especially opposed by respected anti-German intellectuals, such as Van Eeden and Raemaekers, the professor of history Gerhard Kernkamp, and the professors of law Joost-Adriaan Van Hamel and Antonius Struycken. They used several anti-German Dutch newspapers and periodicals such as *De Telegraaf*, *De Amsterdammer*, *De Tijd* and *De Nieuwe Amsterdammer* to expose German expansionist plans (Lobbes forthcoming). Cartoons were used to visualize the gloomy future of the Netherlands if it were to give in to German luring. In ‘Nederland en Blauwbaard’ [The Netherlands and Bluebeard], Piet van der Hem depicted how a German Bluebeard tried to seduce a Dutch maiden with the following words: ‘just a little rapprochement, Your Worship, and then you will have a brilliant future’. The portrayal of the invaded Belgium, the annexed Alsace-Lorraine and the dependent Poland with tortured and dead bodies in the background was intended to warn the Dutch readership of German lies (Van der Hem 1915) (Fig. 5.2).

In his weekly column in *De Amsterdammer*, Kernkamp promoted a reinforced Dutch nationalism as an antidote to the German threat. “If Germany wins, then it will demand territorial expansion, this means the annexation of Belgium, probably also a part of the Netherlands” (Kernkamp 1914). The Dutch support for Belgium was fed not only by empathy, but also and primarily by their own national concern. Kernkamp increasingly stressed that the restoration of Belgium was the prerequisite for the survival of Dutch independence (Kernkamp 1919). The chief



Fig. 5.2 Van der Hem, *Nederland en Blauwbaard*. [*The Netherlands and Bluebeard*], cover of *De Nieuwe Amsterdammer*, 9.10.1915



editor of *De Amsterdammer*, Joost-Adriaan Van Hamel, sided with Kernkamp and continuously attacked the pro-German alliance by stating that a strong Belgium involved not only “a matter of civilization but also the national interest of the Netherlands” (Van Hamel 1915c: 1, 1915c). Their promotion of Dutch nationalism illustrates a general shift in Dutch public debate. The belief in neutrality as the single way to maintain Dutch independence diminished, as Germany, and also Great Britain, regularly violated Dutch neutrality. For many anti-German intellectuals, Germany posed the largest threat to a Dutch autonomy, which could only be ensured by the Allies (Tames 2006: 166–168).

In the summer of 1915, the Dutch slowly became aware of the secret collaboration between Flemish, Dutch and German intellectuals, when pleas for Flemish autonomy started to surface. Anti-German Dutch intellectuals suddenly realized that not all Belgians and Dutch pulled in the same direction. Struycken voiced this disappointment in his article ‘De Belgische zaak en de Vlamingen’ [The Belgian Case and the Flemish] in May 1915:

We thought we knew the Belgian case. (...) Almost with envy, we saw the Fleming and the Walloon, side by side, fighting this war for their national existence (...) But now we hear something else (...) how the Fleming, by nature, does not love the Belgian state (...) and that he would consider it progress if the Germans could achieve an autonomous development of the Flemish people (...) Flemish, you violate the Flemish case. You still need to learn to understand the value of a national state. (Struycken 1915: 44f.)

Struycken’s rather patronizing speech demonstrated that he approached the painful Flemish grievances mainly from a Dutch point of view. In order to survive this war, many anti-German Dutch expected salvation from a reinforced national consciousness, not only in the Netherlands but also in Belgium. As a true believer in the existence of a “Belgian soul”, Struycken branded anti-national Flemish thinkers as “enemies in their own country” (Struycken 1915). The German *Flamenpolitik* urged some Dutch intellectuals to keep their distance from internal Belgian matters, but it also, as Struycken’s example shows, prompted a rising number of Dutch intellectuals to actively fight German solutions for Belgium and to interfere in the Flemish question (Van Hamel 1915b: 1).<sup>17</sup> The Dutch resistance against the pro-German alliance was soon organized into two other coalitions.

### 3 THE PRO-FRENCH ALLIANCE

In the summer of 1915, when the Dutch fear of German expansionism became omnipresent, a large-scale coalition of anti-German Dutch intellectuals, French-speaking Belgian refugees and French propaganda officials came together in a shared love for French culture. In July 1915, the francophone Belgian socialist and journalist Louis Piérard who had fled to Amsterdam, the French-Hungarian intellectual C.S. de Solpray, the French propaganda official Georges Gaillard, and the Dutch literary and art critic Johan de Meester set up the richly illustrated literary periodical *La Revue de Hollande*.<sup>18</sup> In April 1916, another pro-French initiative was born: the bi-national cultural society, *Nederland-Frankrijk* [The Netherlands–France], led by the Dutch professor in Romance philology, Jean-Jacques Salverda de Grave (Fig. 5.3).

*La Revue de Hollande* and *Nederland-Frankrijk* were eager to strengthen cultural exchanges between the Netherlands and France by organizing exhibitions of French Impressionism, by producing French translations of Dutch literature and by increasing academic interaction. Both initiatives covertly received official French support. *Nederland-Frankrijk*, in particular, was a truly French production.<sup>19</sup> For the outside world, this society presented itself as a purely cultural, apolitical and Dutch initiative, but investigation reveals that *Nederland-Frankrijk* was founded during meetings between Salverda de Grave and the French envoy in The Hague, Henri Allizé. The society stemmed from a strong official ambition to expand French cultural influence, not only in the Netherlands, but also in other neutral nations (Montant 1989: 1334–1339).<sup>20</sup> Both initiatives perfectly fitted

Fig. 5.3 Advertisement for *La Revue de Hollande* (*De Telegraaf*, 1.07.1915, p. 4)





the main French goal of taking advantage of the increasing Dutch suspicion of Germany and to promote France as the guardian of Belgian and Dutch independence.

The pro-French cultural initiatives enjoyed great success. By July 1917, *Nederland-Frankrijk* had accumulated no less than 800 members, including members of the Dutch cultural elite of the time. The society enjoyed support from famous Dutch writers such as Frederik Van Eeden, Henri Borel, Jacob Israël de Haan and Dirk Coster, composers such as Alphons Diepenbrock, artists such as Jan Toorop, Philippe Zilcken and Louis Raemaekers, and academics, such as Gerhard Kernkamp, the historian Johan Huizinga and the scholar in Romance languages, Pieter Valkhoff.<sup>21</sup> *La Revue de Hollande* was internationally more diverse than the more Dutch-based *Nederland-Frankrijk*. As well as Dutch writers such as Van Eeden, Borel, Arthur van Schendel and Hélène Swarth, French writers such as René Bizet and Belgian authors who wrote in French such as Max Elskamp, Fernand Séverin and Emile Verhaeren contributed to the journal.

The appeal of these pro-French cultural initiatives was deeply ideologically motivated. It rested on the rise of Dutch nationalism, as voiced by Van Hamel and Kernkamp. Salverda de Grave summarized the mission of *Nederland-Frankrijk* as follows: “Guaranteeing to France its entitled place in the education of our scientists and the formation of our artists is a deed of national self-defence” (Salverda de Grave 1917). He presented the promotion of French culture as a means of detaching the Dutch from Germany. With his focus on “national self-defence”, Salverda de Grave feared that a too powerful German cultural influence would mean the end of Dutch autonomy. Until the turn of the century, French culture had deeply influenced Dutch society and Salverda de Grave regarded a re-orientation towards the “Latin spirit” during the war as the necessary antidote to the threat of German cultural imperialism. Ultimately, Salverda de Grave aimed at a balanced international influence on Dutch culture, which he took as defining its unity (Sanders 2009).

Thus for those Dutch intellectuals who wished to fight the German promotion of Germanic kinship, an emphasis on France as their main reference culture appeared to be a most useful device. Even though the Dutch spoke a Germanic language, some argued, the Dutch were equally imbued with “Latin” characteristics and this possessed something distinctive and unique.<sup>22</sup> The focus on Dutch singularity also aimed to counter-act persistent French notions of the Dutch as mentally, culturally and

racially “nearly Germans”.<sup>23</sup> While Dutch–German unity was often identified in the domain of “blood” and kinship, French–Dutch connections were located in the domain of the spirit and of mentality. In his essay “Hollandais et Français” [Dutch and French], Salverda de Grave claimed that the Dutch had more in common with the French than with the Germans, on the assumption that they shared patriotism, respect for the individual and a desire for democracy (1916). In *La Revue de Hollande* and *Nederland-Frankrijk*, historical examples were used to underpin this shared identity, such as the interactions between the “École de Barbizon” and the “Haagsche School”, or Dutch intellectuals who wrote in French, such as the eighteenth-century writer Justus van Effen (Valkhoff 1918: 5–8; see also Oomkens 1916).

In addition to ideological motivations, Dutch intellectuals had also literary and professional ambitions to join French propaganda initiatives. French literature deeply attracted Dutch writers of all generations, while some of them like Verwey had also found their way to German publishers since the end of the nineteenth century. Yet very few of them had been granted the opportunity to publish in Paris (Kemperink 2001; Sanders 2016: 41–69). The Belgian publisher, Louis Piérard struck a chord with Dutch writers when he offered them the opportunity to translate their work into French. In *La Revue de Hollande*, Piérard published work of Borel, Boutens, Van Eeden and Van Schendel in French (*La Revue de Hollande* 1915–1917).<sup>24</sup> The wish of the major Dutch literary society, the *Vereeniging van Letterkundigen* [Society of Writers], which also welcomed Flemish authors, to support *La Revue de Hollande* was another sign of Dutch literary “francophilia”. In May 1916, de Solpray and Piérard announced to society members that *La Revue de Hollande* was willing to publish Dutch literature in France.<sup>25</sup> This prospect was attractive, as it could alleviate a painful situation for Dutch francophiles, namely that the Dutch were far more familiar with France than the French with the Netherlands.<sup>26</sup>

The fight for a restored Belgium was self-evident for those pro-French Dutch intellectuals who opposed German infiltration in the Low Countries. The German attack on Belgium had caused many of them to become “anti-German” in the first place, and France was considered to be the most trustworthy belligerent power when it came to Belgian and Dutch independence.<sup>27</sup> Yet in pro-French circles, the plea for a freed Belgium took on a specific form. *La Revue de Hollande* and *Nederland-Frankrijk* largely focused on the restoration of a specifically bilingual Belgium, and

their constant celebration of French culture resulted in a decline in Belgian cultural expression in Dutch. Debates about the future of Flanders were generally omitted.

When Flemish culture was debated, it mostly considered bilingual Flemish authors who wrote in French, such as Emile Verhaeren and Max Elskamp. In his reviews of Belgian literature, Pieter Valkhoff mainly approached Belgian authors as mediators of a certain “Latin spirit”. Belgian writers, whether they wrote in French or in Dutch, were considered to offer Dutch intellectuals the opportunity to renew their contacts with French culture. Belgian writers:

(...) nous transmettent un peu de culture française, des façons de pensées wallonnes, ils nous révèlent l'âme de la Flandre dans leur musique et dans leurs chants. [(...) they bring us a little French culture, a Walloon way of thinking; they reveal to us the soul of Flanders through their music and their songs.]. (Valkhoff 1915: 364, translation F. Rash)

When he discussed this Flemish soul, Valkhoff stressed the specific “esprit de terroir” of the Flemish issuing from the bilingual Belgian nation rather than the separateness of Flemish literature written in Dutch. The absence of Flemish culture in *La Revue de Hollande* also seemed to be stimulated by the Walloon, Louis Piérard, who was a francophone hardliner. Before the war, Piérard had rejected Flemish demands and promoted the racial-linguistic affinity between Wallonia and France. During the war, he continued this programme in the Netherlands. He lectured mainly about Belgian literature written in French and controversially claimed that the Belgians had two mother countries, France and Belgium, which should find expression in a Belgian–French alliance.<sup>28</sup>

Thus in *La Revue de Hollande*, Dutch adherents became involved in a typically Belgian hornets’ nest. Yet the reluctance of some pro-French Dutch intellectuals to deal with Flemish culture in “Nederland-Frankrijk” or in *La Revue de Hollande* was again fed much more by their prioritization of their own national Dutch interests than by support for Piérard’s hopes for a mainly francophone Belgium. As a united and restored Belgium was assumed to serve national independence, they kept their distance from the Flemish question.

In any case, the willingness of Dutch intellectuals to promote French cultural influence in the Netherlands, and by extension in Belgium, must have disappointed many members of the Flemish Movement, whether

they were patriots or activists. The plan to reinforce French culture among Dutch-speakers of course touched the Flemish in a very tender spot. It may have reminded them of a lingering Dutch lack of sensitivity for their inferior position within the largely francophone Belgium. The popular poet René de Clercq expressed this Flemish concern very aptly, although his own anti-Belgian motives for criticizing a French cultural orientation would not be shared by a majority of the Flemish. At a meeting of the Dutch *Vereeniging van Letterkundigen*, de Clercq demonstrated his aversion for the Dutch desire to support *La Revue de Hollande*. The Dutch ought to know better, he argued: for their Flemish kinsmen, the enemy “not only came from the east, but also from the south” (de Clercq 1916: 3).<sup>29</sup> He advised his Dutch colleagues to favour principles of linguistic brotherhood over literary and financial ambitions. In a furious letter to a Dutch colleague in June 1916, he cleverly exposed the diverse motives that fuelled this war of cultures: “Will someone in these times compromise his own people, just for the benefit of the small, personal honour of possibly being translated?” The Flemish, as de Clercq noted, counted on their Dutch brothers to liberate them from the French yoke.<sup>30</sup> Paul van Ostaijen equally blamed the Dutch for lacking “racial pride”: if they wrote about the Belgians, they too often did it in French (quoted in De Ridder 2009: 385).

There were, however, pro-French Dutch intellectuals who regarded not only Germany, but also France as a threat to Dutch-speaking culture in the Low Countries. Writers and journalists such as Van Hamel, Van Eeden and Borel supported the struggle of their Flemish “linguistic brothers” on condition that they remained true Belgian patriots and refused any German offers. These three writers, who were all members of *Nederland-Frankrijk* and contributed to *La Revue de Hollande*, believed that the celebration of French culture was necessary for the survival of the Dutch nation, but they realized that it was inconvenient and dangerous for the emancipation of the Flemish. These reservations motivated them to form a final and largely understudied pro-Belgian and pro-Flemish coalition.

#### 4 A RESTORED BELGIUM AND A BLOOMING FLANDERS

In the pro-Belgian and pro-Flemish alliance, Van Hamel, Van Eeden and Borel supported Flemish patriots such as the politician Frans van Cauwelaert and the writers Cyriel Buysse and André de Ridder. They all backed the idea of “a restored Belgium and a flourishing Flanders” (Van

Hamel 1915f: 1). Van Hamel and Van Eeden, both editors of *De Amsterdammer*, preferred the well-being of the Dutch and the Belgian nation to the construction of a racial-linguistic community. In July 1915, Van Hamel attacked Gerretson's Greater-Netherlandish ideas: "However warm the Dutch feelings of kinship, and however greatly the different members of the Dutch 'family' concern us (...) still, the fear cannot be obscured that these feelings are now being misused (...) to conduct a tendentious political action. Namely: to subvert the Dutch national interest through the ideals of Dutch kinship" (Van Hamel 1915d: 1). Van Hamel did cherish a feeling of kinship between all Dutch speakers, and supported the Flemish linguistic grievances, but these feelings of kinship, he stated, were now being misused to sacrifice Belgian, and, as a consequence, Dutch independence.

In contrast to *La Revue de Hollande* and *Nederland-Frankrijk*, Van Hamel realized that the Flemish question needed to be solved: an unstable Belgium would keep provoking foreign, and especially German, interference. In comparison to Antonius Struycken, Van Hamel also showed more empathy with the difficult situation of the Flemish. "The Belgian annals", he wrote, "testify to a long and deeply offensive tendency to underestimate the potential of the [Flemish] people" (Van Hamel 1915c: 1). Therefore, he argued that the Dutch host country should not only watch over the material well-being of the Flemish refugees, but also over their spiritual welfare, by helping them to preserve "their people's character" (ibid.). Writing in *De Amsterdammer*, Van Hamel supported strikingly firm solutions for the Flemish grievances: he argued that the Flemish should not wait until the end of the war to insist on a fuller recognition of their cause within the Belgian state. With this suggestion, he offered Flemish patriots a chance, supported by anti-German Dutch intellectuals, to express their demands clearly:

Already now one can plead for workable forms of a more powerful Flemish self-governance, Flemish Higher Education (...). But it is impossible to demand an autonomous, flourishing Flanders, *if necessary* outside the framework of the Belgian state and if necessary by using its conquerors. (Van Hamel 1915e: 1)

Van Hamel's plea for stronger Dutch-Flemish cultural interaction was supported by Van Eeden, who in February 1915 had urged Dutch intellectuals to take their remaining Flemish colleagues under their wing. For

Van Eeden, the arrival of Flemish refugees in the Netherlands had been a blessing in disguise:

The Flemish and the Dutch will be enriched and driven to a greater unity. After all, the [German] oppressor will make use of the language difference within Belgium and try to win the Flemish over to the German side. That is why it is important for us, the Dutch, to support the Flemish with our language. In our midst, the Flemish language can remain intact, (and) also the French disdain for this so-called “small language” or “people’s dialect” (...) will come to an end. (Van Eeden 1915)

So, even before the German *Flamenpolitik* was generally known, Van Eeden presented a clear perception of how German officials would exploit Flemish grievances. He promoted the intensification of Flemish–Dutch cultural exchange and the strengthening of their shared Dutch language as a weapon against not only Germanization but also against the menace of Romanization. His plea for remaining “ungermanized and unromanized” coincided with the concerns of his Flemish patriotic friends (Wils 2014).

Van Eeden showed a nuanced appreciation of the challenges faced by the Flemish Movement during the war. Before the war, he had served as an example for young Flemish militants in Antwerp. Van Eeden’s novels, in which he expressed his political activism for a socially equal and peaceful world community, appealed to other Flemish writers’ literary, ethical and political aspirations. Flemish admirers mixed Van Eeden’s call for an anti-authoritarian and emancipatory youth movement with their own desire for a freer Flanders (De Ridder 2009: 263–282). During the war, Van Eeden probably wanted to use his authority to urge Flemish militants to remain loyal to Belgium and to refuse any German solution to their problems. As an internationalist, he rarely supported the idea of kinship, but as a defender of oppressed small nations, he believed that the Flemish and the Dutch had to struggle together to preserve the “purity” of Dutch as a cultural language against every form of imperialism (Van Eeden 1915).

*De Amsterdammer* thus served as a platform for a desired Dutch–Flemish cultural interaction. Van Hamel in particular took his self-proclaimed duty towards his Flemish kinsmen seriously. From the autumn of 1915 onwards, he launched multiple sensational campaigns in *De Amsterdammer* to unmask German influence on Dutch and Flemish newspapers such as Gerretson’s *De Vlaamsche Stem* and *Dietsche Stemmen*, which Van Hamel correctly exposed as “German voices” (Van Hamel 1915b: 1, 1915h). In these

disclosures, he stressed that “those who let them be used against Belgium and in service of pan-Germanism” should be denationalized, referring for example to the involvement of a small number of Dutch professors in the German-steered university of Ghent (Van Hamel 1915g: 1).

Behind the scenes, Van Hamel also actively lobbied to strengthen Flemish loyalty to the Belgian state. As a member of the Dutch board of *De Vlaamsche Stem*, he vainly tried to prevent Gerretson’s coup (Van Hamel 1915a: 1; de Schryver 1971: 215ff., 270 f.). As a professor himself, he urged Dutch academics, in cooperation with his Flemish friend, Frans van Cauwelaert, to reject flattering German invitations to join the university in Ghent (ibid.: 290 f.). In *De Amsterdammer*, the cartoonist Johan Braakensiek assisted Van Hamel’s campaign by trying to alert the Dutch to the idea of a German threat behind the *Flamenpolitik*. In his cartoon *The Germanization of the University of Ghent*, he depicted a German soldier who cleaved the “Belgian tree” into Flanders and Wallonia. This reminded Dutch readers that Germany’s so-called warm feelings for the Dutch language actually concealed the desire to undermine Belgium (see also Fig. 5.4).

In *De Amsterdammer*, Van Eeden and Van Hamel also devoted space to articles by patriotic Flemish intellectuals such as André De Ridder and Léo van Puyvelde on Flemish literature and art, and also on Flemish political demands. It was no accident that the column ‘Van Vlaanderen’ [From Flanders] made its debut precisely in October 1915, when the machinations of the German *Flamenpolitik* surfaced and when Gerretson’s siege of *De Vlaamsche Stem* was succeeded. The editors of *De Amsterdammer* introduced this column by referring to Van Hamel’s idea about the Dutch duty (Fig. 5.5):

In these turbulent times, Flanders and the Netherlands should be closely knit together. (...) and when the Flemish want to secure, within the Belgian nation, their own national character more firmly, then the contact with the Netherlands will lend them support to block French and German absorption.<sup>31</sup>

De Ridder, who had left *De Vlaamsche Stem* after Gerretson’s coup, was appointed as the editor of Van Vlaanderen. He took the Dutch appeal to heart, as he considered the interaction between Flemish and Dutch culture to be vital for a blooming Flanders. But so far, according to De Ridder, the Flemish and the Dutch had been merely strangers to each other, which

Fig. 5.4 Braakensiek,  
“As Long as I can Sow  
Discord”, *De  
Amsterdammer*,  
21.10.1916

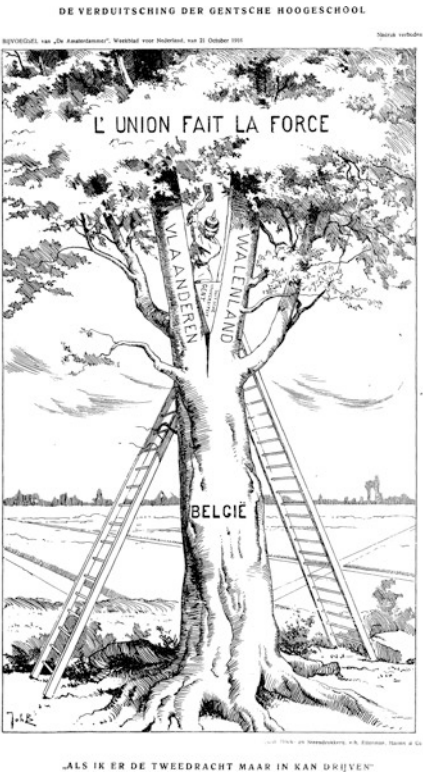


Fig. 5.5 Column ‘Van  
Vlaanderen’, [From  
Flanders] in *De  
Amsterdammer*, 1915





was a familiar complaint. In this column, only Flemish intellectuals who had fled to the Netherlands made their appearance. Gabriël Opdebeek, Paul Kenis and De Ridder himself discussed the impact of the war on Flemish literature, the war novels of Verhaeren and Buyse, typical Flemish carillon music, and the exhibitions of the expressionist paintings of Frits van den Berghe in Amsterdam. In the more political-social contributions of Julius Hoste Jr. and Leo van Puyvelde, the Flemish struggles, both past and present, were explained for a Dutch audience.<sup>32</sup>

It was no coincidence that next to the column Van Vlaanderen, *De Amsterdammer* advertised for a new journal *De Kroniek. Maandschrift voor Noord- en Zuid-Nederland* [The Chronicle. A Monthly Journal for the Northern and Southern Netherlands]. *De Kroniek* was another pro-Belgian product of the Dutch–Flemish alliance, and Flemish writers and artists also received much attention. It was set up by Borel and Buyse in November 1915 to “strengthen the bonds of sympathy that unite Belgium and Holland”.<sup>33</sup> Within the context of the Flemish question, however, *De Kroniek* pursued a far less radical direction than *De Amsterdammer*. Next to articles about Dutch culture, the journal was devoted to Belgian cultural manifestations in both languages, while political discussions about the Flemish question were generally omitted. Here, the official “Belgicist” point of view of the Belgian government, namely to postpone linguistic debate until after the war, was supported. This moderate point of view probably incited the Belgian propaganda office in The Hague to send this journal to the Belgian soldiers at the front to counter the propaganda of the German *Flamenpolitik*. While the editor Borel worked in the service of the official French propaganda press office in The Hague, official French support for these pro-Belgian cultural activities in the Netherlands seemed to have been withheld.<sup>34</sup> The secret French promotion of Flemish patriots could have been a strategic option in their struggle against Germany’s war strategies in the Low Countries, but this was most probably too much of a stretch for French officials as they mainly focused on the promotion of francophone Belgian culture (De Waele 2002).

## 5 CONCLUSION

The war stimulated an increased consideration of race, language and culture as elements of cohesion, visible in the promotion of pan-Germanism, pan-Slavism and, among Dutch-speakers, pan-Netherlandism or Greater-Netherlandish ideas. Within this context, Dutch intellectuals pon-

dered the value of race, the nation and linguistic brotherhood. As speakers of a Germanic language, “neutral” Dutch intellectuals were confronted with the German *Flamenpolitik* which directly involved them into the linguistic question of Belgium, a bilingual nation that represented *par excellence* the struggle between German *Kultur* and French *civilisation*. The diverse Dutch responses to the German *Flamenpolitik* and the Flemish question resulted into multiple transnational alliances.

The Dutch positioning in relation to Belgium and the Flemish question was strongly connected to the ideal image of their own nation. Fear of German expansionism reinforced Dutch nationalism and turned many Dutch intellectuals against the pro-German alliance. For anti-German Dutch intellectuals, the struggle for the preservation of the Dutch nation included a fight for a freed Belgium. Pro-French circles tended to have a difficult relationship with the “blackened” Flemish question, while other more pro-Flemish Dutch intellectuals connected the well-being of the Dutch nation and the balance of power in Europe to the restoration of Belgium, in which Flemish culture urgently needed to be honoured. The largely shared desire to remain independent from German influence united patriotic Belgian and Dutch intellectuals, especially in the two first years of the war. Yet the revival of expansionist Belgian plans at the end of the war would severely undermine this Belgian–Dutch rapprochement and reignited mutual distrust, even more so when it was again exploited by German propagandists to convince the Dutch to choose Flanders over an expansionist Belgium.

## NOTES

1. Translations from Dutch into English are made by the author and Felicity Rash.
2. The studies of Lode Wils (1996, 2014) have been very fruitful in revealing the Dutch share in the German *Flamenpolitik*. But the focus on the role of pro-German Dutch intellectuals in Flemish activism has resulted in a tendency to overestimate the impact of pro-German Dutch intellectuals in the Netherlands and to omit other Dutch attitudes towards the *Flamenpolitik*. See also De Waele (1996), Vanacker (1991).
3. In transnational studies about the First World War in the Netherlands, the topic of interaction between Dutch and Belgian intellectuals is largely omitted (Tames 2006; Brolsma 2016). Sanders (2009, 2011, 2016) has examined pro-French Dutch intellectuals, while leaving out their interest in the Flemish question. Ham focuses on the interactions between pro-German Dutch and Flemish intellectuals (2008). Van Tuyll van

- Serooskerken (2016) highlights the complicated Belgian–Dutch relations during the war, while mainly focusing on political-military, diplomatic discussions around the Peace Conference in Versailles.
4. Other positions were, for instance, the pro-Flemish attitude of Leo Simons and Marcellus Emants who supported an anti-Belgian inspired Flemish autonomy but who to some extent kept their distance from the pro-German alliance (van den Steene 2001: 64–118),
  5. Letter from Gerretson to Jacob Israël de Haan, 22.04.1915, Gerretson archives, National Archives, The Hague, 2.21.246/443.
  6. The Dutch word *stam* is difficult to translate into English. In Dutch it literally refers to the trunk of a tree; in German it could be translated as *Stammverwandte Völker*. English “race” fits the meaning of *stam*, since Gerretson uses *stam* to refer to cultural, linguistic and ethnic relations and blood ties. Yet as Dutch and Flemish intellectuals far more often used *stam*, as Ham suggests (2008: 23–28). I will therefore refer to the word *stam* by using “tribe”, “kinship”, “kinsmen” and “family”.
  7. ‘Vlamenprogramm’, von Kühlmann to von Bethmann Hollweg, 23.10.1915, Politische Archiv, Auswärtiges Amt (PAAA), Berlin, R4486.
  8. Letter from von Kühlmann to von Bethmann Hollweg, 5.10.1915, PAAA, R.122708.
  9. Von Kühlmann to von Bethmann Hollweg, 29.08.1915, see also reports of 8.05.1915, 30.05.1915, 5.06.1915 (Smit 1964: 23).
  10. “Deutschland, Flandern, Holland”, 7.10.1915, PAAA, R4486.
  11. “La Belgique au tournant de son histoire”, R72537, Bundesarchiv Berlin.
  12. Letter from von Kühlmann to von Bethmann Hollweg, 9.05.1915, 17.05.1915, PAAA, R122708.
  13. Letter von Kühlmann to R.A. Schröder, 18.10.1915, R.A. Schröder. Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach.
  14. Letter Greshoff to Anton Kippenberg, 22.08.1915, archives Greshoff, Letterkundig Museum, The Hague.
  15. The history of Insel Verlag’s translation project is very complex and illustrates that intellectuals had divergent reasons—from ideological to professional and financial—for participating in belligerent cultural propaganda (Van den Berg 2014).
  16. Letter of von Kühlmann to von Bethmann Hollweg, 24.05.1916, PAAA, R8324.
  17. For more on the issue of disappointment see “Vlaamsche litteratuur in Duitsland”, *De Telegraaf*, 13.10.1916, 2.
  18. See also G.S.S., “Dîner, jubilé, baptême”, *La Revue de Hollande*, 1, 1915, pp. 138–139.
  19. French officials were less willing to support *La Revue de Hollande*. Piérard got support from the French Ministry of Arts and the Foreign Office, but

- other officials refused to fund the magazine, as de Solpray was of Hungarian origin, and as such issued from enemy territory (Pierson-Piérard 1971: 58–60, 256–257).
20. Letter from Maurice Gandolphe to Henry Allizé, 24.04.1916, 306 Propagande, Poste La Haye, Archives de la Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (AMAE)/Nantes; Rapport de Maurice Gandolphe, 12.05.1916, nr. 13, Papiers Berthelot, MP, AMAE/Paris.
  21. Liste des membres “Nederland-Frankrijk” 1917, 306 Propagande, Poste La Haye, AMAE/Nantes
  22. *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 21.01.1917.
  23. “La neutralité hollandaise”, 16.03.1916, Maison de la Presse, 14, Belgique-Pays-Bas, AMAE/Paris, 24.
  24. Letters from Piérard to Van Eeden, Special Collections, University of Amsterdam, archives Van Eeden-genootschap, XXIV C66.
  25. “De Vereeniging voor Letterkundigen. Jaarvergadering in Hotel American”, *De Telegraaf*, 4.06.1916, 8.
  26. *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 21.01.1917.
  27. In general, Dutch intellectuals were far less charmed by the English claims to be the guardian of small, neutral nations. Great Britain increasingly pressured Dutch neutrality and lasting memories of the Boer War provoked deeply rooted anti-British sentiments among the Dutch. In many ways, France was considered to be the less threatening belligerent (Lobbès [forthcoming](#)).
  28. See, for example, “Nederlandsche Belgische voordrachten”, *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant*, 3.03.1916, p.3. Piérard was a supporter of the Walloon Movement which demanded more autonomy for Wallonia; he reconciled his regionalist ideas with his love for a mainly francophone Belgium (van Ginderachter 2005: 293; 303–304).
  29. See also G.S.S., “Notes, faits et documents”, *La Revue de Hollande*, 1, July 1915, 138–139.
  30. Letter from René de Clercq to Carel Adama van Scheltema, 28.06.1916, Letterkundig Museum, Den Haag, Collection Adama van Scheltema, C.2872 B.1
  31. Van Vlaanderen, *De Amsterdammer*, 24.10.1915, p. 3.
  32. Van Vlaanderen, *De Amsterdammer*, 1915–1916, see 5.12.1915, 30.01.1916, 2.04.1916, 13.05.1916, 30.12.1916.
  33. *De Kroniek*, nr 1. 1915.
  34. *De Kroniek*, December 1915, 2, p. 2. So far, I have found no trace of French support for this Dutch-Belgian journal *De Kroniek* (Lobbès [forthcoming](#)).

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# Which Belgium After the War? German Academics Dealing with the First World War and Its Aftermath

*Geneviève Warland*

## 1 INTRODUCING THE ISSUES

Reassessing German intellectual war propaganda [*Kriegspublizistik*] in the First World War, some German scholars have focused on the issues of the Belgian State's neutrality since its independence in 1830 and the ethnic/linguistic division of the country between Flemings and Walloons (Wende 1969; Lademacher 1971; Dolderer 1989). Other scholars have analysed the ideological and political relevance of academics' discourse during the war (Schwabe 1961, 1969; Mommsen 1996) and taken into consideration the Belgian issue. One study is especially devoted to the "Antwerp Question" as a controversial case among German professors (Schmidt-Supprian 2005). More recently, attention has been drawn to the mobilization of public opinion in German newspapers with a special focus on the construction of the representations of Belgian people as an enemy (Bischoff 2013, 2015). The aim of such literature is to disclose the ideology and the

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rhetoric of German academics towards Belgium. The more radical German academics promoted an annexationist programme furthering German expansionism; more moderate ones, equally concerned with the securing of the Reich's borders, did not pursue such expansionist politics even if some of them supported German hegemonic goals (mainly in Africa).

Belgian scholarly literature on Belgian–German relationships has paid a great deal of attention to one aspect of the Belgian issue, which has had an impact on the evolution of the Flemish movement: the German *Flamenpolitik*. Was the radical wing of the Flemish movement, namely Activism, a consequence of German politics during the Belgian occupation (Wils 1974, 2014), or was the groundwork for it already prepared decades before the war by the nationalist propaganda of German pressure groups like the *Alldeutscher Verband* (Yammine 2011, 2013)?

There is only a small amount of literature (and certainly not in English or French) on the topic at stake here: What legal status should be given to Belgium after the war? Which kinds of model were envisaged by academics? The most informative study so far is Winfried Dolderer's very well-documented book (1989): *Deutscher Imperialismus und belgischer Nationalitätenkonflikt: die Rezeption der Flamenfrage in der deutschen Öffentlichkeit und deutsch-flämische Kontakte 1890–1920*. The author gives an instructive overview of the main tendencies in German publications which developed plans for the political future of Belgium. Nevertheless, he confines himself to just one topic involved in that question: the political and cultural defence of the Flemish people by the *Reich*, which he assumes was not the most important aspect of the *Kriegspublizistik* [war propaganda] regarding Belgium. This being said, issues of Belgian ethnicity formed part of a legitimizing argument in the discourse on war aims, underpinning possible new legal models for this country.

My objective here is to reappraise German intellectual propaganda during the war by focusing on the political models academics conceived for Belgium in a post-war context. I shall try to answer the following questions: Why did Belgium attract such attention in the *Kriegspublizistik*? Who were the academics who entered the debate on Belgium's political status and why? How did they envisage dealing with Belgium in the case of German victory but also in the case of defeat or, to speak in the terms of the war literature before the end of 1918, once peace had been negotiated? More precisely, which kinds of state structure are evoked? Did the plans change during the war? Can we assert that the radical annexationist projects, supported mostly by conservative academics, paved the way for

more moderate plans, laid down by liberal academics, who tended to be the main participants in these discussions at the end of the war?

In his book Dolderer highlights four kinds of justification for integrating the Belgian State into the German sphere of influence, whatever legal form this might take (total or partial annexation): the first justification concerns the security of the Reich at an international level; the second aims to preserve German economic advantages with regard to Belgium; the third is based on the lack of stability of the Belgian State due to its non-homogeneous national character and its dependence on European powers; and the fourth brings to the fore the defence of the oppressed Flemish population (Dolderer 1989: 65 f.). These arguments are of three different types: the first has a strategic and military character and is related to international stability; the second is economic; and the last two have political and cultural significance.

To answer the above-mentioned questions and to further develop Dolderer's conclusions, I shall focus on the legal frameworks for a new Belgium which would never again represent a threat for Germany, as delineated in the war propaganda of German university professors.

## 2 *DIE BELGISCHE FRAGE* (KARL LAMPRECHT)<sup>1</sup> OR *DAS BELGISCHE PROBLEM* (CONRAD BORCHLING)<sup>2</sup>

Belgium became a problem from the beginning of the war: not only did the Belgian authorities refuse Germany's ultimatum on 3rd August and resist the invading German armies, but the population seemed to cause trouble because of the supposed presence of *franc-tireurs* (plain-clothes irregular troops). August and September 1914 were thus dominated by violent reactions on the part of the German troops: plundering, massacres and burning of buildings (Horne and Kramer 2001). The burning of the university library of Louvain/Leuven on 25th August 1914 crystallized a massive protest from Allied and Entente opinion (Schivelbusch 1993). The war between armies and against civilians during late summer and autumn 1915 was eventually supported by an intellectual war in which university professors and intellectuals, notably from France, Great Britain and Germany, took an active part.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most controversial German declarations, the *Aufruf an die Kulturwelt!* [Appeal to the World of Culture] of 4th October 1914, initiated by representatives of the *Kultusministerium* [Ministry of Culture]

and signed by 93 well-known German academics, tried to provide a justification for the German invasion of Belgium and the subsequent destruction and injuries.<sup>4</sup> To sum up, the declaration denied a breach of Belgian neutrality, refuted the violence against Belgian civilians, and justified the destruction of Louvain/Leuven as a necessary act of self-defence. Its arrogance and lack of sensitivity provoked a *Krieg der Geister* [war of the minds],<sup>5</sup> mainly between Germany and Great Britain: the Belgian issue came to the forefront in the *Kriegspublizistik*.

The so-called Belgian problem gave birth to a wide range of articles, brochures and pamphlets written by humanities professors. This literature covers a wide range of topics, from the geographical peculiarities of the country (Philippson 1916) to economics (Wiedenfeld 1915; Schumacher 1917; Arndt 1918; Waentig and Gehrig 1918), institutions, politics and diplomacy as raised by the issue of Belgian neutrality (von Below 1915, 1916 and 1917; Schulte 1915; Strupp 1917; Zitelmann 1917; Bornhak 1917) through history (Hampe 1915a, b; Valentin 1915; Lamprecht 1916), arts, literature and languages (Borchling 1914; Hausenstein 1915; Oßwald 1915).<sup>6</sup>

War publications often constitute a blind spot in the bibliography of academics and are in many cases not mentioned in biographical notices.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, most of them were already collected during the Great War and integrated into the collection of war documents of the Prussian State Library in Berlin: *Kriegssammlung der Preussischen Staatsbibliothek*.<sup>8</sup> They are part now of the so-called *Sammlung "Krieg 1914"* in the *Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin* [Berlin State Library]. The texts I have looked at come mainly from this library. There is also another very helpful collection of war documents, *Weltkriegssammlung: Erster Weltkrieg* [World War Collection: First World War] at the *Deutsche Nationalbibliothek* [German National Library] (DNB) in Leipzig: all of this information can be accessed through the DNB online catalogue. Even though this literature was provoked by the war and participated in both a defensive and an offensive discourse regarding Belgium, I believe that it is not solely oriented towards the legitimization of German political and military action. First of all, it is worthwhile to recall the official ban on public discussions of Germany's war aims, which applied mainly to the newspapers.<sup>9</sup> To inform public opinion and to influence the government through publications, letters and secret memoranda were thus the expression of the self-mobilization of German academics (Schmidt-Suprian 2005: 269). The degree to which they involved themselves in political matters was in some cases linked to their academic discipline: even some historians like Dietrich Schäfer, who was one of the most productive *Kriegspublizisten*, or

Johannes Ziekusch, who proposed concrete plans for Belgium and described how to realize them; others, like the art historian and journalist Wilhelm Hausenstein or the medievalist Karl Hampe, would distance themselves from contemporary, or give priority to historical, evidence. By contrast, professors of economy or law, like Hermann Schumacher or Ernst Zitelmann, whose research and teaching fields were more anchored in the contemporary, were not self-restricted and more willing to focus on a the short or middle term.

### 3 GERMAN UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS AT WAR: THE BATTLE OF ARGUMENTS

The involvement of German academics with war propaganda is not surprising. It shows a continuity with the role they assumed in Wilhelminian Germany as builders of a political consciousness.<sup>10</sup> University professors behaved as opinion builders through public scholarship or through participation in associations like the nationalist *Alldeutscher Verband* [Pan-German League] or the progressive *Verein für Sozialpolitik* [Association for Social Policy], rather than through membership of a party (as in the *Vormärz*). Some historians, like the aforementioned Dietrich Schäfer, were involved in the formulation and justification of German imperialism.<sup>11</sup>

However, university professors' activity in the public sphere was on the decline: with the professionalization of academic research and teaching they saw their duty as citizens in their scholarship. It was mainly in periods of crisis that they again embraced the role of political mentors (Schwabe 1961: 603). Even if some university professors were not inclined to take part in political and national debates before the war, they changed their minds after its outbreak and delivered speeches and published books in order to make sense of the war (Schwabe 1961: 630). These academics, who were too old to serve in the army, used their pens and voices to support the war effort and the morale of the *Daheimgebliebenen* [those who had stayed at home]: in doing so they built up the *Heimatfront* [Home Front] (this concept was created at the beginning of the war by German propaganda) (Reichert 2009: 109ff.). Such is, for instance, the case of the above-mentioned historians Karl Hampe and Karl Lamprecht but also of the geographer Alfred Philippson (1864–1953), professor in Bonn, who knew Belgium well because his brother Franz had settled in Brussels and was a renowned banker. Such an attitude applies equally to professors in other countries: “Even professors skeptical of imperialist and nationalist movements before the war believed it was now their duty to help mobilize their fellow citizens

patriotically. Humanities professors regularly published popular books and articles that aimed to mobilize their compatriots. These writings were technically not propaganda; the publications were voluntary, without direction from the militaries or the civilian governments, at least until the last year of the war. They were nonetheless indispensable to the combatant nations in getting their citizens to embrace the war effort and challenging representations of their nation's image abroad" (Donson 2014: n.p.).

Karl Hampe (1869–1936), medievalist at the University of Heidelberg, testifies to such a spontaneous involvement of university professors in the discussion about the war's causes and objectives.<sup>12</sup> During the war, he wrote several articles and booklets on Belgium: the first ones, *Belgiens Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (1915a) and *Belgien und die grossen Mächte* (1915b) were written on his own initiative<sup>13</sup>; other contributions were commissioned, the most important being his book *Das belgische Bollwerk* (1918c), which was the result of an order given in 1915 by the German occupation government in Belgium to study archival materials in order to ascertain whether Prussia had a claim to the bastions of Namur and Liège. Hampe's answer, which was the result of a strictly historical investigation, was negative. When he looked back at his war literature on Belgium, Hampe recognized that it had been influenced by the patriotic context and the hope for German victory. However, as his publications were produced with scholarly methods and objectives (see also Hampe 1918a), he believed that they were of value (Hampe 1969: 51–54). More striking is the fact that Hampe did not publish his personal opinion on Belgium's future until the end of the war: his agreement at the turn of 1915–1916 with the idea of a Belgian protectorate with a Flemish majority ("Schutzstaat mit 'vlämisch-germanischer' Mehrheit") as a middle way between annexation and non-annexation ("zwischen Annexion und nicht-Annexion") was only revealed to his war diary and in a private letter (Reichert 2009: 127ff.). The solution he suggested in 1918 is not as harsh as that of 1915–1916, even if it is not fundamentally different.<sup>14</sup> This is to say that opinions could have changed during the war, but generally there were only small changes, as illustrated by another case below, that of Hermann Schumacher.

As Klaus Schwabe has shown (Schwabe 1961: 602ff.), the university professors who took part in the discussion about Belgium can be divided into two groups: on the one hand, the moderate or liberal academics like the members of the *Verein für Sozialpolitik*: Gustav von Schmoller, Lujo Brentano, Hans Delbrück, Friedrich Meinecke, Walter Goetz, Ernst Troeltsch, Max Weber, Friedrich Naumann, to name the most renowned; on the other hand, the radical or conservative university professors, like

Dietrich Schäfer, Reinhold Seeberg, Martin Spahn, Hermann Schumacher, Georg von Below, Erich Brandenburg, who were close to the *Alldeutscher Verband*, the [Pan-German League].

Between these two camps, whose leaders were the historian Hans Delbrück (1848–1929), director of the *Preußische Jahrbücher*, for the moderates, and the historian Dietrich Schäfer (1845–1929) for the radicals, the stumbling block was the politics of annexationism, especially in Western Europe. The former were principally opposed to territorial expansion as Germany was conducting a defensive war; the latter saw the opportunity to extend German borders and secure the German Empire by gaining parts of Belgium and France. The opposition between the *Gemässigten* [moderates] and the *Annexionisten* [annexationists] culminated in the summer of 1915 with the publication of the *Seeberg-Adresse*, signed by 352 academics, and a response to it in the form of a *Gegenerklärung* [counter-declaration] written by Delbrück and signed by 141 professors and intellectuals (Schwabe 1961: 616; more generally on Delbrück, see Lange 2010).<sup>15</sup>

If both camps differed on the attitude to adopt with regard to Belgium (entire or partial annexation or no annexation), they shared two premises: the fiction of Belgian neutrality (Dolderer 1989: 55)<sup>16</sup> and the concern for the security of the German Empire. But they disagreed on issues regarding the Flemish question, the existence of a Belgian nationality and the legitimacy of a “small” state.

I shall now present the models constructed by academics towards a legal solution to the future status of Belgium. This literature written during the war is redundant: not only did some booklets see several editions in the course of the war, but some authors also reworked previous articles into brochures (or the reverse), defending the same general arguments with more or less details. Another point to underline is the interrelatedness of these writings: they refer often to each other and present themselves sometimes as an answer to opposing opinions. The corpus of sources that I wanted to strengthen and that I also have used the most here are the various booklets especially devoted to Belgium and written by university professors.

#### 4 BELGIUM AS PART OF GERMANY: TOTALLY OR PARTIALLY ANNEXATIONIST SOLUTIONS

Wir müssen Belgien behalten. Und zwar muss Belgien nicht bloß irgendwie Deutschland angegliedert werden, sondern Belgien muss aufhören, selbständiger Staat zu sein, es muss Deutschland einverleibt werden. [We

must keep Belgium. Belgium should not be merely annexed to Germany in one way or another, but Belgium should cease to be an independent State anymore, it should be incorporated into Germany]. (von Hoensbroech 1917a: 2f.)

This opinion, expressed by the very conservative journalist and writer Paul von Hoensbroech (1852–1923), is the most radical version of annexationism (see also von Hoensbroech 1917b), which was not truly supported by the mainstream of German radical academics. In general, annexationism represents the stronger standpoint in 1914–1915 and includes the opinions of the professors who were striving for a total or a partial annexation of Belgium to the *Reich* (Schwabe 1969: 84 f.). Their fierce promoters like Dietrich Schäfer and the *Nationalökonom* Hermann Schumacher (1868–1952) had close contacts to German industrialists who were mostly interested in annexing Belgium for economic reasons (Schwabe 1969: 56, 1966: 114 f.).<sup>17</sup>

The two main arguments supporting an expansionist policy regarding Belgium were the questioning of Belgian neutrality and the desire to prevent Belgium getting revenge with the help of the Western powers. Moreover, the liberation of the Flemish population served as a strong legitimizing motive; however, it was always subordinated to politics and economy (Dolderer 1989: 61). Both of these reasons associated German power politics (*Machtspolitik*) with a nobler German mission, which consisted of supporting the claims of an ethnic minority (Schwabe 1969: 85).

A predominant declaration with regard to the program of the radicals and to Belgium is the *Seeberg-Adresse* (20th June 1915) (Böhme 2014: 135 f.), initiated by the theologian Reinhold Seeberg (1859–1935). This declaration, which represented a peak in the campaign of the *Alldeutscher Verband* pleading for a victorious peace (*Sieggfrieden*), testified how widespread annexationism was among academics during the first year of the war (Schwabe 1961: 615 f.; Böhme 2014: 19). As for Belgium, the following was suggested:

Belgien, das mit so viel edelstem deutschen Blut erworbene, müssen wir (...) politisch-militärisch und wirtschaftlich fest in der Hand halten. (...). Politisch-militärisch geurteilt ist es klar, dass im anderen Falle Belgien nichts anderes werden würde als eine Deutschland auf das höchste bedrohende englische Angriffsbasis (...). Wirtschaftlich bringt uns Belgien einen gewaltigen Machtzuwachs. Auch völkisch kann es zu einem starken Zuwachs werden, wenn sie das in seiner Kultur uns so verwandten Vlémentum im



Laufe der Zeit aus der künstlichen romanischen Umklammerung befreit und auf sein Germanentum zurückbesinnt. Von den Problemen (...) heben wir hier nur hervor: es ist den Bewohnern durchaus kein politischer Einfluss im Reich einzuräumen; und es sind in den von Frankreich abzutretenden Gebieten die machtgebenden Unternehmungen und Besitzungen aus deutschfeindlichen in deutsche Hände überzuführen. [We must hold Belgium firmly in our hands, which was conquered with so much noble German blood, for political-military and economic reasons. From a political-military perspective, it seems clear that Belgium would otherwise become once more a greatly threatening base from which England could attack Germany (...). From an economic perspective, Belgium provides us with greatly increased power. Such a gain can also be interpreted as an ethnic one, when the Flemings, who are culturally the kinfolk of the Germans, will be liberated from their artificial Romance heritage and remember their German roots. As for the possible difficulties (...) we want only to emphasize the following: Belgians should be given no political influence within the Reich; and in the territories which will be abandoned by France, the key anti-German companies and properties should be ceded to Germans.] (Böhme 2014: 128)

This declaration refers not only to the two leitmotivs—to avoid Belgium becoming a bastion of England and to strive for the acculturation of the Flemish population—but also includes very restrictive legal measures: no civil rights for citizens of Belgian ancestry in the *Reich* and confiscations of the property of Germany's opponents.

Such harshness is actually to be found in several memoranda and publications of the radicals, covering options from a total or partial annexation to the creation of a kind of colony. The economist Hermann Schumacher, who was one of the most active representatives of the radical trend, had written several booklets about Belgium, particularly about Antwerp (Schumacher 1917, 1918). He also was involved in a controversy, which was reported in English newspapers, about the integration of the harbour city into the *Reich*, which set his annexationist standpoint apart from that of another economist, Kurt Wiedenfeld (1871–1955), who insisted on the maintaining of the independence of the city and of the Belgian State (Schmidt-Supprian 2005: 260ff.). In a memorandum of 1914, Schumacher planned a division of Belgium in two parts, a Flemish one and a Walloon one, under the model of a “self-governing colony” that should never be a part of the German *Reich*. The independent State of Flanders would join the German Customs League; Antwerp and Liège

would be annexed to the German Empire. If a politics of *Regermanisierung* [regermanization] had to be applied in the Flemish part, Wallonia would be subject to a strong-arm policy: efforts should be made to encourage French-speakers to immigrate to France; the possessions of recalcitrant people would be confiscated. The goal was to create incentives for a German colonization of Wallonia for economic purposes (Schwabe 1966: 114ff.). In his brochure *Die Lösung der belgischen Frage* (written in 1916 and published in 1918), Schumacher revised some of his previous statements, mostly in the direction of establishing a similar status for Wallonia as for Flanders; the idea of the forced emigration of the Walloons disappeared. This later conception is more similar to those of Zitelmann and other academics who considered Belgium, or rather Flanders and Wallonia, as sovereign states under the *Reich's* military and diplomatic control.

Schumacher's proposal in 1914 of a Belgian colony with the economically important cities belonging to the *Reich* counts among the most radical solutions. As in all such proposals, it assumed a differential treatment of the Flemings and the Walloons. If the Flemings should be reinforced in their cultural rights and progressively encouraged to strengthen their ties with Germany, the more radical authors always suggested a forced assimilation of the Walloon population and even expulsion to France for the French-speaking people who resisted.<sup>18</sup>

In *Die Zukunft Belgiens* (1917), the architect and art historian Cornelius Gurlitt (1850–1938), professor at the University of Dresden, who had been active during the war in the protection of monuments,<sup>19</sup> gave a more nuanced account as far as the Walloons are concerned, but he pursued the same objective of Belgium's integration into the *Reich* at two “speeds”, a Flemish one and a Walloon one:

Meine Einsicht ist, dass die niederdeutschen Vlamen dem Reiche in einer angemessenen Weise angegliedert werden müssen. Wir wollen sie als Brüder in unseren Kreis aufnehmen und des Widerstandes nicht achten, den Einzelne uns entgegensetzen werden. Das Reich soll ihr geistiges Wohl in gleicher Weise schonen und fördern, wie es das der Bayern, Schwaben, Alemannen, Sachsen, Niederdeutschen pflegt, wie es im Elsass ein neues Erblühen der Stammeseigenart ermöglichte. Die Wallonen sollten nicht minder darin gestärkt werden, ihrer Eigenart zu leben. Sie sind nicht unserer Art, ihr Land aber bildet ein Glied dessen, was wir zur Erhaltung unserer Lebenskraft brauchen. Das hat der Krieg erwiesen. (...). Es werden die Wallonen daher von deutscher Macht beherrscht werden müssen, so lange

bis sie erkennen, dass sie sich mit den Verhältnissen loyal abfinden und sich aus eigenem Antrieb Deutschland angliedern müssen. [My opinion is that the Flemish people, who are Low Germans, should be integrated into the Reich in a proper way. We want to accept them as brothers into our cultural sphere and disregard the resistance that some individuals may give. The Reich should preserve and encourage their mental well-being as it does for Bavarians, Swabians, Saxons, the Alemannii and the Low Germans, and just as it has enabled Alsatian ethnicity to bloom again. The Walloons should equally be encouraged to strengthen their distinctiveness. They are not like us, their country, however, forms a part of what we need to maintain our vitality, as the war has shown. (...) This is the reason why the Walloons should be dominated by the Germany until they recognize that they must accept the new order and integrate into Germany of their own accord.] (Gurlitt 1917: 21f.)

Gurlitt's model is a kind of protectorate composed of two states, a Flemish one and a Walloon one, neither having sovereignty rights (Gurlitt 1917: 158ff.): if the Flemish part should have more autonomy, the Walloon part should remain an "einheitlicher Staat (...), bei dem alle Rechte der belgischen Krone an den deutschen Kaiser übergehen" [united state, in which King's rights would be ceded to the German Emperor] (ibid.). Gurlitt's proposal does not seem to have had as wide an impact as other brochures coming from economists or law professors who were published by renowned publishers like Teubner in Leipzig and Berlin.

Even if academics generally did not refer to it, the parallel in the case of Belgian annexationism has to be drawn with the institutional organization of the part of Alsace-Lorraine the German Reich gained after its victory in the Franco-Prussian war. The *Reichsland Elsass-Lothringen* [State of Alsace-Lorraine] was placed under the responsibility of the German Emperor with the presence of the *Reich's* army and the administration of the railway by the *Reichsbahn* [State Railway]. Alsace-Lorraine gained eventually in autonomy and became a *Land* [German State] in 1911, but its regional parliament was never allowed to send representatives to the *Reichstag* in Berlin. Actually, it was not strategic to mention Alsace-Lorraine as a model during the war, given that their people caused trouble to the *Reich's* government. It was only the Bonn law professor Ernst Zitelmann (1852–1923) who explicitly rejected applying this model of annexation to Belgium because of its failures (Zitelmann 1917: 22).

## 5 (PARTS OF) BELGIUM AS *SCHUTZSTAAT(EN)* OR *SATELLITENSTAAT(EN)* OF THE GERMAN EMPIRE

Belgien als selbständiger, aber von Deutschland abhängiger Staat. [Belgium as an autonomous State, but dependent upon Germany.] (Zitelmann 1917: 28)

This excerpt comes from Zitelmann's brochure *Das Schicksal Belgien beim Friedensschluss* (1917), which was considered as one of the most realistic projects among the conservative camp.<sup>20</sup> He constructed a model which recognized Belgium as a sovereign state to some extent. Zitelmann's project belongs to a set of proposals agreeing with the maintenance of a Belgian state or with the creation of two states. The motives for establishing a Belgian *Schutzstaat* [Protectorate] were actually the same as those of the radical academics who wanted to annex the country: to secure the German Empire and strive for the cultural and political rights of Flemish people. I shall deal here with two topics: on one hand, the legal form of Belgium as a *Schutzstaat*, on the other, the particular type of bond to the *Reich*.

As for Belgium's legal framework, some authors promoted an administrative separation linked to the constitution of a Belgian federal state (*Vereinigten Staaten von Belgien*) under the extended political, economic and military control of the *Reich*. Such a solution, in line with the politics of the German occupation regime in Belgium was, for instance, promoted by the Catholic politician and journalist Leo Schwering (1883–1971), who suggested that Flanders could become an autonomous protectorate and Wallonia a security buffer for the *Reich* (“Reichssicherungsgebiet”) (Schwering 1917: 112). Meanwhile, the majority of authors (such as Borchling, Brandenburg, von Gierke, Ziekursch and Zitelmann) proposed the creation of two autonomous states, a Flemish one and a Walloon one. As Otto von Gierke (1841–1921), professor of history in Berlin, wrote “eine bloße Verwaltungstrennung genügt nicht” (a mere administrative separation is not sufficient) (von Gierke 1917: 62), in order to implement the Flemish demands. The preference for two states was underlined with arguments emphasizing the artificiality of the Belgian state (“künstliche Staatsgebilde”) (ibid.) or the lack of a Belgian nationality (“eine belgische Nation hat es niemals gegeben”) (Brandenburg 1917: 79).

By the creation of two Belgian states, some authors like Erich Brandenburg (1868–1946), professor of history in Leipzig, differentiated

between Flanders and Wallonia: if Flanders could become an autonomous state, Wallonia should stay under strict German control (Brandenburg 1917: 79–83). But in as much as this model anticipated a form of Belgian protectorate, many authors agreed with the creation of two equal states. Between these two states, Zitelmann suggested placing a king to keep them in personal union (*Personalunion*) and to assume the functions of both *König von Flamlnd* and *König der Wallonen* (Zitelmann 1917: 86). On the other hand, the liberal conservative historian Karl Hampe did not agree with a state union (*staatsrechtliches Band*) between Flanders and Wallonia and even less with a personal union (Hampe 1918b: 360 f.).

Whatever the relationship between Flanders and Wallonia should be, conservative academics conceived exactly the same frame of governance for both parts: German supremacy (*Deutsche Oberherrschaft*) applied not in the administration of the country, but in its diplomacy and achieved through the presence of German troops.<sup>21</sup> From an economic point of view, Flanders and Wallonia would become members of the German Customs League. Zitelmann's proposal coincided largely, for instance, with that of Johannes Ziekursch (1876–1945), professor of history in Breslau, who considered Belgium as a “selbständiger Staat” [autonomous State] (Ziekursch 1916: 24) under German military and diplomatic supremacy (ibid., 20) and took into consideration the model of “Luxemburg als neutraler Staat und Glied unseres Zollgebietes” [Luxembourg as a neutral State and member of our customs territory] (ibid., 19).

As for Belgium's internal organization, Zitelmann highlighted this point:

Es bleibt also unabhängig in seiner gesamten inneren Verwaltung, in Kirche und Schule, in Gerichtswesen und Finanzwesen, in Münzwesen und Verkehrswesen (insbesondere auch in Post und Telegraphie) (...). [It remains autonomous in its whole internal administration, in Church and education, in its judicial system and finances, its coinage and transportation (especially in post and telegraph) (...).] (Zitelmann 1917: 53)

Zitelmann's precision is noteworthy because some academics like Brandenburg wanted the takeover of the railway as well as the post by the *Reich* (Brandenburg 1917: 70 f.).

Moreover, these authors highlighted the fact that Belgium was accustomed to a governance model that included extensive internal autonomy and an external subordination to another state: such was the political and

institutional structure of the Low Countries until Belgium's independence. As Ziekursch wrote:

Die lokale Autonomie hat (...) stets höher gestanden als die staatliche Souveränität. Eine nicht allzudrückende Abhängigkeit des Ganzen von einer höheren Staatsgewalt hat man meist willig ertragen, wenn nur die örtliche Selbständigkeit, die überlieferten Gewohnheiten und Freiheiten geschont wurden und das wirtschaftliche Gedeihen gesichert blieb. [Local autonomy has (...) always been superior to State sovereignty. A not too oppressive dependency on a superior State power had mostly been willingly accepted, if local autonomy and traditions and liberties have been preserved as well as economic prosperity being secured.] (Ziekursch 1916: 25)

The legal and economic discourse underlying the creation of two Belgian states, as briefly described here, was complemented by an ethnic and cultural discourse conducted by philologists who saw themselves as the exclusive defenders of the oppressed Flemish people. Their paternalistic motives applied not only to the mistreatment of Flemish people by the Francophone elite (on an educational level, they had fewer schools and on an economic level, Flanders, which was more agricultural, was less developed than Wallonia), but they were also furthered by racial arguments (Flemish people belonged to "*Deutschtum*", the *Deutscher Stamm* [line, tribe]). Accordingly, the philologist Conrad Borchling (1872–1946), professor in Hamburg who specialized in *Niederdeutsch* [Low German], suggested that Flanders, Brabant and Limburg would constitute an independent State ("selbständiger niederdeutschen Staatswesen") with Antwerp as capital:

Auf alle Fälle müsste dem Vlämischen Volke die Möglichkeit gewährleistet werden, seine germanische Eigenart unbehindert weiter auszubilden; es dürfte auch nicht etwa nun ein übermächtiger Druck der hochdeutschen Sprache an die Stelle der bisherigen Oberherrschaft des Französischen treten. (...). Ein selbständiger vlämischer Staat würde dabei besser noch als eine vlämische Provinz Deutschlands jener höheren Aufgabe dienen, aus der Mehrheit der germanischen Staaten den großen germanischen Bund entstehen zu lassen, der die Hoffnung unserer Zukunft ist. [The Flemish people must always be given the opportunity freely to develop their German character; High German should not be given a dominant position as has been the case with the French language. (...). An independent Flemish State would be better than a Flemish province of Germany in the service of

Germany's great undertaking, namely the foundation of a German confederation composed of the majority of German states: that is the hope for our future.] (Borchling 1914: 28)<sup>22</sup>

As for the bond with the German Empire, the conservative academics always specified that military and diplomatic functions would be controlled by the *Reich*. The idea was to build a *Wall von abhängigen Staaten im Westen und Osten* [wall of independent states in West and East] (Brandenburg 1917: 56), or *Schutzstaaten* [protectorates] with regard to Germany (ibid., 83). Legal treaties would define the contractual clauses of such an international "protection association" ("völkerrechtlichen "Schutzverbandes"), to quote the historian Otto von Gierke (von Gierke 1917: 65). Putting his knowledge of international law to use, Zitelmann completed his brochure with a proposal for a treaty between Belgium and Germany (Zitelmann 1917: 69 f.).

Belgium's relative autonomy in the framework of the protectorate's conceptions did not preclude a later annexation to the *Reich* as assumed by Zitelmann (Zitelmann 1917: 55; Ziekursch 1917: 26). Hampe predicted the same evolution: starting off as parts of the *Zollunion*, the two Belgian states would be progressively integrated into the German Empire (Hampe 1918b).

## 6 BELGIUM AS AN INDEPENDENT STATE: STATUS QUO ANTE ON THE EUROPEAN CONTINENT

Am weitesten verbreitet ist in Deutschland zweifellos der Gedanke, Belgien zu annektieren. Und gerade dieser Gedanke ist der unheilvollste von allen. [The idea of annexing Belgium is undoubtedly the most popular in Germany. And precisely this idea is the most disastrous.] (Quidde 1915: 11)

The opposition to the annexationist programme of the *Alldeutscher Verband* came from Hans Delbrück, as mentioned above. While he expressed this idea very often in his correspondence, even at the beginning of the war (Schwabe 1966: 130ff.), he first made it public in his petition reacting to the *Seeberg-Adresse*. This "*Gegenerklärung*" [counter-statement], the so-called "Delbrück-Dernburg Petition" (Grumbach 1917: 354 f.), which was sent to the Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg, defended a negotiated peace ("*Verständigungsfrieden*"). Delbrück's position gained increasing support from 1915 onwards (Schwabe 1961: 611), for example from Max

Weber, Adolf von Harnack, Friedrich Meinecke, to name but a few (Schwabe 1969: 86).

In his *Gegenerklärung*, after having reminded readers of the defensive character of the war, Delbrück insisted on one principle:

(...) dass die Einverleibung oder Angliederung politisch selbständiger oder an Selbständigkeit gewöhnter Völker zu verwerfen ist. [(...) the incorporation or affiliation of politically independent nations or nations which are used to being independent has to be rejected.] (Böhme 2014: 136)

For Delbrück, this principle did not contradict the fact that every effort had to be made in a peace treaty to secure the existence of the German Empire, which meant removing all the elements of the threat represented by England and preventing any country becoming a bulwark (*Bollwerk*) against Germany.

Delbrück's point of view referred to the necessity of maintaining an equilibrium among the European powers and preventing a hegemonic position for Germany, which would repeat the mistakes of Napoleon's foreign policy.<sup>23</sup> He nevertheless conceded that Germany should pursue its colonial policy and in one of his writings from 1917 argued in favour of lands in Africa to enable Germany to acquire an overseas empire like France and Great Britain:

Nicht Belgien, sondern Afrika; nicht das Kohlenbecken von Charleroi, sondern Nigeria; nicht Zeebrügge, sondern die Azoren, Madeira und die Kapverdischen Inseln. Nicht Antwerpen, sondern Lagos, Sansibar und Uganda, und Gibraltar für Spanien. Nicht Wirtschaftsvorteile durch erzwungene Handelsverträge, sondern Kriegsentschädigung in bar oder Rohstoffen. Das Deutschland Belgien gewinne, daran hat keiner unserer Bundesgenossen ein Interesse; (...) dass Deutschland ein großes Kolonialreich in Afrika gewinne, daran hat von unsern Bundesgenossen die Türkei ein sehr starkes direktes Interesse und Österreich-Ungarn wenigstens ein indirektes (...). [Not Belgium, but Africa; not the coal basin of Charleroi, but Nigeria; not Zeebrugge, but the Azores, Madeira and the Cape Verde Islands. Not Antwerp, but Lagos, Zanzibar and Uganda, and Gibraltar for Spain. No economic benefits through enforced trade agreements, but war reparations paid in cash or in raw materials. No German ally would benefit from an annexation of Belgium by Germany; (...) but the constitution of a large German colonial empire in Africa would directly serve the interests of our Turkish allies and, at least indirectly, those of Austria-Hungary (...).] (Delbrück 1919: 205)



As far as Belgium was concerned, Delbrück always insisted on the need to preserve Belgian sovereignty. When the discussion of a negotiated peace became more widespread among academics from 1916 onwards, Delbrück again argued for an “öffentliche, uneingeschränkte deutsche Verzichtserklärung für Belgien” [public and unlimited German declaration of renunciation of Belgium] (Delbrück 1919: 342–346). He presented a set of arguments against any kind of subordination of Belgium, for both domestic and international reasons. He also disagreed with the idea that Belgium was an artificial state, as assumed by Brandenburg, von Gierke and Hampe (*ibid.*, 345).

Delbrück’s point of view was not isolated and was supported by other liberal progressive academics. The war literature on Belgium contains other arguments for the rejection of annexation, even in the form of a protectorate. Heinrich Waentig (1870–1943), professor of economy in Halle, who was a member of the occupation regime for the entire duration of the war as head of the press department, was opposed to any aggressive protection of German interests in Belgium.<sup>24</sup> Placing his reflections in the frame of a negotiated peace, he again stood up for Belgium’s independence, defining the economic relationship between Belgium and Germany as driven by a community of interests (“Interessengemeinschaft”) based on true reciprocity (“wahrer Reziprozität”) and not on German subordination (“nicht der einseitigen Unterordnung”) (Waentig 1918: 376 f.).

Not just liberal progressive academics opposed expansionism with regard to Belgium; those who were close to the social democrats reacted in the same way as well. Such is the case of the historian Veit Valentin (1885–1947), who lost his position at the University of Freiburg because of his opposition to the plans of the *Alldeutschen* [Pan-Germans].<sup>25</sup> Another historian, Ludwig Quidde (1858–1941), journalist and president of the German Peace Society, who signed Delbrück’s petition, wrote an anonymous brochure: *Reale Garantien für einen dauernden Frieden* (1915) [Real Guarantees for a Permanent Peace].<sup>26</sup> This pamphlet repudiates *seriatim* the arguments of the most radical position in the German war literature represented by economic leagues close to the *Alldeutscher Verband*. Quidde was opposed to any kind of annexations in Europe. At all levels (political, strategic and economic), the arguments in favour of an integration of Belgium into the German Empire had to be swept away. To treat the Belgian population as colonized and deprive people of their rights would provoke another world war, because no powers would accept such a backward situation in Europe. Further, the takeover of the country

would bring huge costs to Germany and economic damage to its industry and harbours. From a military or strategic standpoint, the annexation of Belgium would offend the United Kingdom and necessarily lead to war. It would also constitute a threat for other small states in Europe like the Netherlands and thereby compromise the European balance of power.

Moreover, Quidde favoured the resolution of conflicts through international law:

Aus den Erfahrungen dieses Krieges, seiner Entstehung, und seines Verlaufes, muss deshalb der stärkste Antrieb zur Weiterbildung, Vervollkommnung und Sicherung des Völkerrechts entstehen. [As testified by the experiences of this war, its origins and its progress there should be a strongest incentive for the formation, the completion and the securing of international law.] (Quidde 1915: 19)

Nevertheless, if the German Empire should definitely give up any claims upon Belgium, it did not mean that all claims in Africa should be abandoned. On the contrary, in Quidde's conception, the acquisition of abandoned territories in Africa would not provoke a war and would provide Germany with steel and harbours which would contribute to its security (Quidde 1915: 21). The last argument referring to the German expansion on the African continent reveals the rock-solid imperialism of German academics, be they liberals like Delbrück or democrats like Quidde.

## 7 CONCLUSION

The analysis of academics' war literature has not been conducted here through the lens of a quantitative approach aiming to determine the number of brochures representing each trend. This kind of research seems to be difficult, uncertain and probably not relevant. A quick glance at the number of signatories to Seeberg's and Delbrück's petitions reveals that the radicals were more numerous than the moderates. Furthermore, the dividing line between annexationism and advocacy of a protectorate does not seem to be very strong: in both cases, Belgium would be subordinated to the German Empire. Schwabe argued to reject any difference in the use of the words *Einverleibung* [incorporation] and *Angliederung* [affiliation]:

Ob man nun – wie meist – großen Wert auf die Unterscheidung zwischen “Einverleibung” (= Vollannexion) und “Angliederung” (= Protektorat) legte, oder ob man sie, wie G. von Below es tat, beiseiteschob, im Effekt

liefen alle Pläne für einen Anschluss Belgiens an die deutsche Machtsphäre auf Schumachers Modell der “self-governing colony” hinaus. [Whether we attached – as most people did – great importance to the distinction between “incorporation” (= total annexation) and “affiliation” (= protectorate), or whether, as did G. von Below, we brushed it aside, in the end all plans moved in the direction of a Belgian integration into the German sphere of influence, as in Schumacher’s model of a “self-governing colony”.] (Schwabe 1969: 86)

The question of whether there was a chronological shift from a prevalent annexationist position in academics’ war literature towards non-annexationist positions is worth asking. As shown by Sebastian Bischoff, the analysis of liberal, conservative and socialist newspapers does not reveal this kind of shift (Bischoff 2013: 27–33). The analysis of the controversies among radical and moderate academics shows a similar configuration as suggested by the publication dates of the brochures: even at the end of the war, academics defended the annexationist view, mostly favouring a protectorate.

Finally, the distinction between, on one hand, academics who were in favour of Belgium’s annexation or of the creation of a protectorate and, on the other hand, those who were opposed to any kind of annexation or affiliation of Belgium with Germany reflects the division of German society and political parties: the first position was supported by conservative parties and economic leagues, the second one by liberal progressive and social democratic parties as well as economic and social associations. It shows also a fracture between the army command on the one side and the government and especially Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg on the other. For reasons of domestic policy as well as of diplomacy, the latter was never keen to see the war as an opportunity to gain territories, either in Europe or further afield.<sup>27</sup>

## NOTES

1. Karl Lamprecht (1856–1915), who knew Belgium very well because of his long collaboration and friendship with the historian Henri Pirenne (1862–1935), introduced his speech on Belgium in Dresden on 4th March 1915 with these words: “Wenn wir uns heute Abend mit der belgischen Frage beschäftigen wollen, die von allen Fragen, die uns entgegengetreten können, wohl die schwierigste ist (...)” (Lamprecht 1916: 33).

2. Conrad Borchling (1914), *Das belgische Problem*. This brochure deals mainly with Belgium's history and suggests a solution to the cultural oppression of the Flemings by the Walloons: the independence of Flanders guaranteed by the German Reich.
3. See, for example, Hanna (1996), Mommsen (ed.) (1996), Schwabe (1969) and Flasch (2000) (the latter referring mainly to philosophers).
4. See also von Ungern-Sternberg and von Ungern-Sternberg (2013), vom Brocke (1985).
5. To quote the title of Hermann Kellermann's 1915 publication which gives an overview of German and foreign newspaper articles on the alleged atrocities of the German troops.
6. See also Ludwig Fränkel's overview, *Aus der neuesten deutschen Literatur über Belgien* (1917), which references the most important contributions and also mentions the *Geschichte Belgiens* by the Belgian historian Henri Pirenne as a good introduction to Belgian history. It also gives a portrait of Belgium under German occupation. See also Kessler (1915) and Anholt (1917).
7. For most of the authors, this is the case for the biographical notices in the *Deutsche Nationalbiografie* or in the *Neue deutsche Biographie*. More information on the war activities and publications of these authors can sometimes be found in monographs if there are any. It is the case for Hampe, Meinecke, Schäfer, but not of all of them.
8. *Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Abteilung Historische Drucke*. For the history of this collection of war publications, see Hamman, *Die Sammlung "Krieg 1914"*.
9. See Mommsen (1969). Such restriction was also a self-restriction on the part of Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg who did not want to speculate on the future or pave the way for the annexationistic demands. He insisted that if the newspapers were controlled, it did not prevent the publication of books and brochures on war aims.
10. On the involvement of the academics during the First World War, see Böhme (2014: 3–35).
11. See also MacClelland (1973) and Fehrenbach (1974).
12. On Hampe's war activities and writings, see Folker Reichert (2009). See also the extensive introduction to Hampe's war diary in Reichert and Wolgast (2004: 11–94).
13. The last contribution was part of the book edited in 1915 by Otto Hintze, Friedrich Meinecke, Hermann Oncken and Hermann Schumacher, *Deutschland und der Weltkrieg*, II, pp. 348–392.
14. Hampe agreed with the creation of two autonomous Belgian states, but for military and economic reasons, he argued that Liège should be annexed and become part of the Reich as it had been under the Holy Roman Empire (Hampe, "Das belgische Problem in historisch-politischer Betrachtung",

- in Walter Goetz (ed.), *Deutschland und der Friede. Notwendigkeiten und Möglichkeiten deutscher Zukunft*, Leipzig/Berlin, Teubner, 1918b, pp. 360–361).
15. The list was first published in the *Preußische Jahrbücher* (vol. 162, October 1915, pp. 169–172).
  16. The common argument refers to secret “conventions Anglo-belges” as a conspiracy between Belgium and the United Kingdom against Germany.
  17. See, for instance, the “pétition des six fédérations économiques au chance-lier” (20. May 1915), reproduced in Grumbach (1917: 91–108).
  18. See for instance von Hoensbruch (1917a: 8–13) and Bornhak (1917: 32, 35–37).
  19. See Gurlitt (1916) and Gurlitt and Clemen (1916). Gurlitt does not seem to have been one of the heads of the *Kommission für die photographische Inventorisation der belgischen Kunstdenkmäler* [Commission for a Photographic Inventory of Belgian Cultural Monuments], which was composed of some 30 scientists and steered by the art historian Paul Clemen. It promoted publication of research tools for the study of Belgian art and architecture. See also Kott (2005: 285 f.).
  20. See, for instance, Fester (1918: 25), and von Gierke (1917: 64).
  21. Von Gierke follows Zitelmann’s model. Moreover, many authors insisted on German military control of the Belgian coast (Brandenburg 1917: 50; Ziekursch 1916: 6–12; Bornhak 1917: 32 f.).
  22. See also Hermann Muchau (1917), who only took into account the ethnic aspects of the Belgian issue and strove for the creation of a *Vlamenland*.
  23. “Sollen wir nun aber etwa beides anstreben, das Kolonialreich und die Herrschaft über Belgien zugleich? Dann würden wir in den Fehler Napoleon I. verfallen. (...) Was uns auch Belgien für Vorteile bieten möge, sie sind immer belastet mit der Hypothek der widerwilligen undeutschen Bevölkerung (...). Was uns auch die Kriegslage erlauben möchte, von Belgien zu behalten, es ist immer besser, dafür sei es ein weiteres Stück Kolonialland oder Kriegsentschädigung zu nehmen” (quoted in Böhme 2014: 207 f.).
  24. Agreeing politically with Wiedenfeld, he found that Antwerp should not have fallen under German control. See Schmidt-Suppran (2005: 267 f). See also his sharp comments on German war occupation regime in Belgium in Waentig (1919).
  25. See Fehrenbach (1971: 69–85) on Veit Valentin. Valentin wrote a book in which he highlighted Belgium’s historical existence and unity (Valentin 1915).
  26. The text is a thorough refutation of the petition of the “sechs wirtschaftliche Verbände”.
  27. See footnote 9.

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## Belgian Exile Press in Britain

*Christophe Declercq*

German troops violated the 1839 Treaty of London by crossing the border with Belgium on 4th August 1914. Gavrilo Princip had already upset the balance of power in Europe five weeks earlier, but when the United Kingdom declared war on Germany over the invasion of Belgium, the resolution of the conflict could only be that one side or the other would win control of the battlefield. If the Treaty of London had been ushered in by the Concert of Europe in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, which came to a conclusion on the fields of Waterloo, the outcome of its violation was that Belgium became a battleground once more. Recording the conflict at the time, and experiencing that recorded conflict, became an extremely complicated business for Belgians. Not only was the Belgian nation state already divided in terms of linguistic ethnicity—largely Dutch-speaking Flanders and francophone Wallonia<sup>1</sup>, and class, as French was the language of social advancement imagology—it had also been invaded by a foreign culture. From the very beginning of the conflict, Belgium's native culture became one of military occupation and confrontation on the one hand, and of social fragmentation and displacement on the other.

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Within a matter of a few weeks, the Germans had taken up their position at the river Yser, and from mid-October 1914 onwards, the German Empire occupied virtually all of Belgium. The Belgian army stood firm at the river Yser, along with its allies. The Belgian government resettled in France and operated from Le Havre. More than a million and a half Belgians fled the country, seeking refuge mainly in the Netherlands, France and the United Kingdom (Declercq 2014: 56). In each of these countries a truly Belgian community spirit emerged. As a substantial and continual movement of refugees took place between those three countries, the respective Belgian communities in exile not only created their own sense of belonging, they also fed into one another. These transnational movements took place mainly in Britain and France, although in the second half of the war, a Belgian community also emerged in Switzerland. Additionally, over 120,000 Belgians were deported to Germany for forced labour (Beckett 2014: 368).

Belgium during the First World War existed as a fragmented nation indeed (Declercq 2016a: 104). Over a dozen parts of varying proportions belonging to the fragmented nation can be distinguished:

- (1) occupied Belgium;
- (2) unoccupied Belgium;
- (3) military Belgium;
- (4) Belgian authorities in Le Havre; and Belgian communities in
- (5) the Netherlands,
- (6) France,
- (7) the United Kingdom,
- (8) Switzerland, and
- (9) even further afield (although numbers are more insignificant, Belgians also settled temporarily in countries like Spain, Tunisia, the United States and Canada);
- (10) Belgians abroad at the time of the outbreak of the conflict (mainly in the Congo);
- (11) forced labour in Germany;
- (12) Belgians who became internally displaced in 1917 and 1918; and
- (13) those whose return differed from most (never returned, could not return to their pre-war life, went back to Belgium but eventually returned to the host nation).

At a time of conflict, when opposing sides were at extreme odds with one another, the fragmented Belgian nation experienced the First World War in such an irregular manner that the sole surviving homeland that could unify

the scattered population was an imaginary one, as is evidenced by the saint-like position occupied by King Albert,<sup>2</sup> who featured heavily in the wartime imagery of Brave Little Belgium.<sup>3</sup> Jules Destrée, who had published a letter to the King in 1912 and claimed that there were no true Belgians anymore, changed his political allegiance over this sense of imagined unity. In 1916, he made a counterclaim—which appeared in *La Grande Revue*, a journal in France—to his earlier point of view and stated that the Belgians had expressed a clear will to live together in a spirit of freedom and independence and that the Belgian nation state was *indestructible* (Libert 2015: n.p.).

For many Belgians, however, the home nation appeared to be fragmented, and everyday representations were presented to them by the many forms of Belgian press. Ranging from the clandestine press in occupied Belgium, over press supported by the German authorities—not least those who supported the *Flamenpolitik* that tried to divide the Flemish and Walloons in a move to create discord—to the refugee press in the various reception countries, trench newspapers and hybrid representations of Belgianness in the national press such as the British press, the Belgian wartime press was as labyrinthine as its native nation (Declercq 2016b).

## I BELGIANS AND THE WARTIME PRESS

The issue of the Belgian wartime press—in particular the role of the exile press and excluding the clandestine press in occupied Belgium—is a very complex one. With regard to the Belgian community in Britain, the seemingly straightforward duality of the British press and its focus on military events in Belgium as well as Belgian refugees in Britain on the one hand, and the Belgian exile press in Britain on the other, is further complicated by the fact that the British press initially included sections for Belgian refugees in French and Dutch, whereas the Belgian press in Britain used a fair amount of code-switching, inserting phrases in language that was not the article's, between English, French and Dutch in order to draw on the British press. Added to this is the fact that the different strands of the Belgian press in exile maintained a mutual relationship in terms of information exchange and printed each other's material. Belgian newspapers in the Netherlands drew on *De Stem Uit België*, which appeared in England, and vice versa. Likewise, Belgian newspapers in France fed into the mainly francophone Belgian newspapers in Britain. It was, therefore, not uncommon to have a francophone Belgian exile newspaper in the Netherlands citing a Flemish newspaper from Britain. Multiple similar transnational examples come to mind. Clearly, the Belgian press and exile during the First World War is a prime example of transnational history.

An overview of Belgian newspapers during the First World War is included below, excluding those that appeared in Britain, which is given later. Although the list is extensive, no examples from occupied Belgium (either permitted or clandestine) have been included either; neither are there pamphlets or trench journals produced by soldiers at the front.<sup>4</sup> There is mention of *Ons Vaderland* because it shared a contributor with one of the Belgian exile newspapers in Britain. The overview given below testifies to the fragmentation of the Belgian nation as well as demonstrating the need for the respective Belgian communities, Flemish and Walloon, to have their linguistic community's identity reflected in their newspapers. As intimated earlier, publications appearing in France and the Netherlands, for instance, often printed stories that were borrowed from each other. In addition, the main exile newspapers of one community—such as the one in Britain—were available to other exile communities, such as the one in France, or vice versa. But that does not make Belgian exile press in France with editorial offices in England a bona fide Belgian exile press in Britain. Belgian newspapers such as *Het Vaderland* and *XXme Siècle* for instance, both published in Le Havre, cannot be categorized as Belgian exile press in England, even though they had subsidiary editorial offices in London.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the *Belgisch Dagblad*, published in The Hague, was available in England through a distribution point in London. *Vrij België* was also available in Britain; the newspaper had eleven distribution points in Central London, one in Ilford and one in Folkestone. Both newspapers were often referred to in *De Stem Uit België* (Table 7.1).

**Table 7.1** Overview of Belgian newspapers during the First World War, excluding those appearing in occupied Belgium, at the front or in Britain.<sup>a</sup>

France	<i>L'Opinion wallonne</i> (Paris), <i>La Patrie Belge</i> (Paris), <i>La Nouvelle Belgique</i> (Paris), <i>Le XXième Siècle</i> (Le Havre), <i>Het Vaderland</i> (Le Havre), <i>Le Courrier de l'Armée/De Legerbode</i> (Le Havre), <i>La Nation Belge</i> , <i>Notre Belgique</i> , <i>Ons Vlaanderen</i>
The Netherlands	<i>Belgisch Dagblad</i> (The Hague), <i>L'Écho Belge</i> (The Hague), <i>Vrij België</i> (The Hague), <i>Le Socialiste Belge/De Belgische Socialist</i> (The Hague), <i>De Vlaamsche Stem</i> (Amsterdam), <i>La Belgique</i> (Rotterdam), <i>Les Nouvelles</i> (Maastricht), <i>Le Courrier de la Meuse</i> (Maastricht), <i>L'Écho d'Anvers</i> (Bergen-op-Zoom)
'free' Belgium	<i>De Belgische Standaard</i> (De Panne), <i>Ons Vaderland</i> (De Panne/Calais) <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>The main source for this is Massart (1917). The details retrieved from Massart were supplemented with Vanden Bosch et al. (eds.) (2010: 36–37).

<sup>b</sup>*Ons Vaderland* did not provide an address for a distribution point in Britain, but it was available there.

However, the Belgian exile press was not as unbroken as would appear from the above overview, and neither were the Belgian journals appearing in Britain. Three categories of Belgian wartime press in Britain can be distinguished. The first and main category consists of daily or weekly Belgian newspapers published with a wide national or near-national distribution in Britain. These newspapers were often publications that had appeared in Belgium before the war and continued in exile, such as *L'Indépendance Belge*, a daily newspaper published in London from 1914 to 1918, and *La Métropole (d'Anvers)*, a weekly newspaper published in London from 1914 to 1919. *De Stem Uit België*, a new weekly newspaper, was published in London from 1914 to 1919 and largely continued as *De Standaard* after the war. None of the other newspapers in this category appeared for the entire duration of the war, however. For instance, *La Dépêche* was a daily newspaper published in London in 1914 and 1915 only, whereas *De Dageraad* was a weekly newspaper published in London only in 1918 and 1919.

The second category comprises publications with a more regional, or even very local distribution, all of a very temporary nature. They include *Le Courrier Belge*, published in Derby, *Le Franco-Belge (de Folkestone)*, published in Folkestone, both in 1914 and 1915, and *The Birtley Echo*, published in 1917 in Birtley, Gateshead. These publications covered a more limited geographical area but contributed significantly to the historiography of Belgian exile newspapers in Britain. Already appearing from 7th September 1914—a full month before Antwerp, the last safe haven in Belgium, fell—*Le Franco-Belge* was the first Belgian publication in exile. The journal proved crucial to the overall history, as about half the Belgians who sought refuge in Britain arrived in Folkestone. Moreover, *Le Franco-Belge* was also the first issue to include long lists of refugee names in its pages, a feature that became part of the Belgian exile newspaper template (Declercq 2015: 188, 198, 205). *The Birtley Echo*, which appeared in the second half of the exile period, was seminal for the history of Elizabethville (Birtley, Gateshead); with roughly 6,000 people, this was the largest Belgian community in Britain.

A third category is a more of a miscellany and includes additional weekly and monthly exile newspapers and journals. The difference between these publications and the previous two categories is that these were often of a more temporary, more regional or more specialized kind (typically maritime trade-related). An example of the latter was *La Neptune*, published as a weekly newspaper in London between 1915 and 1919, whereas *La Tribune Congolaise* was a monthly journal published in London from 1915 to 1918. A representation of the periods in which Belgian exile newspapers appeared in Britain is included below (Table 7.2).

**Table 7.2** Overview of Belgian newspapers printed in exile in Britain, ranked chronologically according to their first appearance in Britain, and with their dates of appearance. (Declercq 2015: 184)

<i>Title</i>	<i>Prior to WWI</i>	<i>Appeared in the UK</i>	<i>Location of editorial team</i>	<i>End of publication in exile</i>	<i>After WWI</i>
<i>Le Franco-Belge (de Folkestone)</i>	n/a	7 Sep 1914	Folkestone	Feb 1915	n/a
<i>La Dépêche</i>	n/a	23 Sep 1914	London	28 Jan 1915	n/a
<i>De Stem Uit België</i>	n/a	25 Sep 1914	London	21 Feb 1919	n/a
<i>L'Indépendance Belge</i>	Est. 1829	21 Oct 1914 <sup>a</sup>	London	26 Nov 1918 <sup>b</sup>	Ceased 13 May 1940 <sup>c</sup>
<i>La Métropole d'Anvers</i>	Est. 1894	22 Oct 1914	London	25 Feb 1919 <sup>d</sup>	Ceased 30 June 1974 <sup>e</sup>
<i>Le Sport Belge</i>	Est. 1879	23 Oct 1914	London	12 Nov 1914 <sup>f</sup>	n/a
<i>Le Courrier Belge</i> <sup>g</sup> / <i>De Belgische Koerier</i>	n/a	10 Nov 1914 <sup>h</sup>	Derby	1915 <sup>i</sup>	n/a
<i>Neptune (d'Anvers)</i>	Est. 1904	6 Feb 1915	London	13 Feb 1919	Ceased 1936
<i>La Tribune Congolaise</i>	Est. 1902	4 March 1915	London	Dec 1918	Ceased on 30 April 1940
<i>The Anglo- Belgian Trade Review</i>	n/a	15 May 1915	London	15 Jan 1916 <sup>j</sup>	n/a
<i>La Belgique Nouvelle</i>	n/a	30 May 1915	London	29 Jan 1916	n/a
<i>Questions – La Revue Belge/The Belgian Review</i>	n/a	Sep 1915	London	Oct 1916	n/a
<i>Anglo-Belgian Exports</i>	n/a	Sep 1917	London	June 1918	n/a
<i>The Birtley Echo</i>	n/a	20 Oct 1917	Birtley, Gateshead	1 Dec 1917	n/a
<i>De Dageraad</i>	n/a	15 Jun 1918	London	15 Feb 1919	n/a

<sup>a</sup>Le Roy (1971) claims that *LIB* appeared from Folkestone a couple of times between 14th and 21st October 1914. However, no further proof of this has been found. The issue of missing copies has been confirmed by Marc D'hoore, the head newspaper archivist at the Belgian National Library in Brussels.

<sup>b</sup>From 26th November 1918 onwards, when *LIB* was relocated to Brussels, the former exile newspaper continued to appear in the UK as *Le Belge Indépendant* for a few more weeks.

<sup>c</sup>The Germans invaded Belgium on 10th May 1940. *LIB* ceased its activities on 13th May, the day German tanks crossed the River Meuse near Namur. Belgium capitulated on 28th May.

<sup>d</sup>For a few issues, *LMA* appeared as *La Métropole d'Anvers/Action Nationale*.

(continued)



Table 7.2 (continued)

<sup>c</sup>From 1965 onwards, *LMA* merged with *Le Matin* and *La Flandre Libérale*.

<sup>f</sup>Anet puts 1914 as the final year of publication (<http://anet.be/record/abraham/opacbnc/c:bnc:5861/N>). The last issue digitised via [hetarchief.be](http://hetarchief.be) is indeed dated 12th November 1914.

<sup>g</sup>A journal with the same name, *Le Courrier Belge*, briefly appeared in London in 1920.

<sup>h</sup>According to the *Bibliographie de Belgique*, the daily newspaper appeared in exile for the first time on 17th November 1914. However the oldest issue retrieved (number 5) was printed in England on Saturday 14th November. It seems therefore more likely that the first issue of LCB/DBK appeared on Tuesday 10th November. *Bibliographie de Belgique* 1919: 179–180.

<sup>i</sup>No clear end date for its publication in exile has been established. The British Library recorded 1915 as its end year of appearance.

<sup>j</sup>This is the date of the last copy held by the British Library.

The above list of Belgian exile newspapers and journals appearing in Britain is only partially complete as it covers what can be considered the main newspapers and journals only. More miscellaneous Belgian daily, weekly or monthly publications appeared as well, such as *The Belgian Commercial Advertiser*, *De Metaalbewerker*, *La Métallurgiste Belge*, *Made in Belgium*, and *Le Cri de Londres*. *Le Courrier de l'Air* can also be added. This was a two-page propaganda pamphlet produced in London and dropped over Belgium. More pamphlets were produced, such as the *Souvenir d'Exil*, a weekly produced at the Belgian Jesuit College in Barmouth.

For the most important Belgian exile newspapers and journals in Britain, formal features such as duration, location and frequency form important parameters contributing to an overall framework through which to assess the variety and importance of the Belgian exile press. However, other elements such as the political orientation of the content, membership of the editorial teams and narrative aspects of their content also played an important part in maintaining the Belgian identity in exile. In this respect, the Belgian exile press contributed to Belgium's specificities immediately before, during and immediately after the First World War, and this is represented by the two main Belgian exile newspapers in Britain.

## 2 TWO BENCHMARK NEWSPAPERS

Arguably the main Belgian newspapers in exile in Britain were *De Stem Uit België* and *L'Indépendance Belge*. They differed along the religious, political and linguistic dividing lines that had run through Belgian society both before and during the war. *L'Indépendance Belge* was a liberal, French-language daily newspaper, with sincere Belgian nationalist tendencies. It had existed before the First World War and continued to exist afterwards.

Such was not the case with *De Stem Uit België*, which only appeared during the war, and continued for a few weeks after Armistice. Initially bilingual and patriotic, the weekly *De Stem Uit België* was visibly Catholic in character and rapidly moved towards a position in which moderate voices in favour of Flemish emancipation were recorded.

## 2.1 *De Stem Uit België/L'Echo de Belgique*

*Le Franco-Belge de Folkestone* was the very first Belgian newspaper to appear in Britain, *La Dépêche* soon followed suit. Three days before the Germans started shelling Antwerp, a third Belgian exile newspaper appeared: *De Stem Uit België (SUB)* was first published on 25th September 1914 as a weekly, appearing on Fridays. Initially, the newspaper was published as *De Stem Uit België/L'Echo de Belgique*, providing a mixture of news in Dutch and French, not as a translation of one another but as separate news items in different languages alongside one another. The subtitle to the newspaper, *Voor God en Vaderland/Dieu et Patrie*, spoke clearly of both patriotic and Catholic editorial priorities. The French *Echo* section became a separate publication for a few months from 4th February 1916 onwards but then vanished. The remaining Dutch newspaper subsequently appeared only as *De Stem Uit België*. The reason for the omission is not entirely clear, but the French-speaking Belgian refugees were already well catered for by other francophone journals, not least of which was *La Métropole d'Anvers*, also of Catholic orientation, whereas the Flemish refugees were not well served. The last issue of *SUB* held in the British Library is dated 21st February 1919.

Published with the permission of the Belgian Minister, Comte de Lalaing—who had been instrumental in adopting Lady Lugard's War Refugees Committee (Storr 2009: 54)—*SUB* was issued not as a commercial enterprise, but with the philanthropic purpose of providing the Belgian refugees with information about events both in Belgium and in Britain, and offering a platform for notices asking for information about the whereabouts of people's families and friends, the latter in parallel to the *Gazet van Antwerpen* in the early stages of the war and *Le Franco-Belge* in Folkestone. The editorial team of *SUB* was based in four different locations in sequence, the last two of which were in Russell Square, first at No. 55, which was provided by The Catholic Association, and finally at No. 21. *SUB* had a varying circulation with, for instance, 11,400 in March 1918 and 10,000 only three months later. However, taking into account

the fact that one reader might very well belong to a family or group of five, that the newspaper was available in public spaces such as libraries, that it was by far the preferred journal of the Belgian Catholic Church delegates and that Belgians assumed the British habit of sharing newspapers, the readership of *SUB* must have easily exceeded 40,000—that is to say, between 15% and 25% of the Belgian community in Britain, depending on the timeframe.

*De Stem Uit België* was under the firm control of the Belgian News Fund (BNF), which had been established by Monseigneur de Wachter, auxiliary bishop to Cardinal Mercier, a fortnight prior to the newspaper's first appearance. Although it was officially published by the Belgian News Fund, the driving force behind the *SUB* was Floris Prims, a canon who was also the treasurer and secretary of the BNF. Most contributions in *SUB* were anonymous; even initials were scarcely used, and at best articles were accompanied by nothing more than a label (such as *legeraalmoezenier*, army chaplain). Among the named contributors to *SUB* was Jules Callewaert, a priest who had taken refuge in England and who had gone to Stockport, Manchester, to administer to several thousand Belgian souls there (Milh 2014: 3).<sup>6</sup> Callewaert also contributed to *De Belgische Standaard*, the only newspaper produced in unoccupied Belgium, and *Ons Vaderland*, a pamphlet produced by soldiers at the front. In April 1919, Callewaert—seen as one of the members of the Front movement,<sup>7</sup> a large group of Flemish politicians, artists, writers and assorted people who advocated a more independent if not entirely independent Flanders—joined a venue in Torhout, near Bruges, where he shared the stage with Dr. Alfons van de Perre (Elias 2008: 227). The latter had been the main financial backer and founder of *De Standaard* in May 1914, an association that was to publish a newspaper of moderate Flemish orientation and that, because of the war, only appeared from December 1918 onwards. Van de Perre was a key figure in financing *De Stem Uit België* too. *SUB* in Britain had been—to a large extent—an intermediate version of the post-war *De Standaard*. Marcel Cordemans, for instance, who had acted as a private secretary to Van de Perre and who had published in *SUB*, became the first editor-in-chief of *De Standaard*.<sup>8</sup> In its political discourse the *SUB* took a mainly Catholic stance, but it still allowed a certain pluralistic approach and included contributions by more liberal or left-wing Flemish nationalists such as Julius Hoste and Arthur Buysse (Wils 1974: 112).

Depending on the time of year, an issue of *SUB* included eight or twelve pages. In the days before Easter, for instance, there would be eight. The following is a breakdown of the content of a random issue from 1917 (*SUB* 29.6.1917). The front page opened with a reference to the fact that

the newspaper would once again have twelve pages as of the following week, and that series like *Soldatenpennen* and *Engelsche Studiën*<sup>9</sup> would resume then too. Most of the front page was taken up by a story by Jules Callewaert, while the rest of the first page and most of the second contained a piece by Leon Maury, an alias for Father Jozef van Mierlo (*Verslagen en mededelingen* 1953: 38). The final column on page two contained an ‘In Memoriam’ as well as a brief piece on potato disease, of interest to those refugees owning an allotment. The third page contained a book review, an instructive piece on the development of the English language and the outcome of a writing competition organized by an association known as ‘British Gifts’. Among the winners were young Flemish writers such as Filip de Pillecyn and Jérôme Leuridan who became renowned Flemish nationalists after the war. Page four was nearly entirely devoted to the war, with reports on the front movements in Belgium and France, official statements from the authorities in Italy, Russia and Greece, and statements by the British and Bohemian socialists. A soldier called ‘Bertal’ recorded his memories of Lourdes, which he called a ‘hearth of soldiers’ [sic]. It would have been common to have a proper name and a reference to the actual soldier’s regiment, so the absence of either raises the question of whether or not the memories of Lourdes were genuine. Page five started on a similar note, only this time with tidings from the homeland. These messages ranged from the passing of the priest of Meerle and the 50th anniversary of someone’s priesthood to an accident in Gheel and the whereabouts of the dairy association in Roeselare. References to everyday life in the homeland were multiple, but the distance while in exile could not have been bigger. The bottom part of the page contained the twentieth instalment of the series *Refugeeliefde* by Floris Prims himself, writing in Dutch and using bits of English and French, a prime example of code-switching in Belgian exile press (Declercq 2009: 105). Nearly the whole of the sixth page was taken up by another series, *De tragedie van Fotheringay*, which was equally dense with code-switching, using mainly English as a second code. Exile newspapers often printed several series, equally often of doubtful literary quality, that used many instances of code-switching. The question remains whether this code-switching was ‘representative of a sense of openness towards the other’ or in fact ‘proof of the invasiveness of that other’, or put differently, was what lay beneath this common practice of code-switching voluntary assimilation or forced acculturation (Walker and Declercq 2016: 8)? The sixth page of the issue of *SUB* concluded with a brief note about possible reimbursements—paid for by Belgian authorities—for families of Belgian soldiers.<sup>10</sup>

On the whole, the most interesting pages of *SUB* were the last two, which contained advertisements and news of refugees. Whenever the issue included only eight pages, the advertisements appeared on the last two, and whenever the issue included twelve pages there could be as many as four pages of advertisements. As with *Le Franco-Belge* and *La Dépêche*, these pages contained news about refugees—Belgians looking for information about their relatives or friends, or making their location known to others—as well as commercial and personal advertisements. The information is very informative about everyday life for a Belgian refugee in Britain: looking for a shop that sells horsemeat, *peperkoek* [similar to gingerbread] and the like, or looking for possible job positions. Belgian horsemeat butchers advertising in *SUB* for instance were located in Bristol, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, London and Oldbury. Besides several shops in Glasgow, there was also a strong presence of horsemeat butchers in west London. House Joseph, with its main shop at 53 Greek Street, Soho, had no fewer than six *bijhuizen* [subsidiary distribution points] most of them being located in west London and Twickenham (*SUB* 30.6.1917: 12).

*SUB* also ran a bookshop, here as well with Floris Prims in charge. Many publications were issued, often in collaboration with Alfons de Groeve, a Belgian publisher in exile in Leiden. In addition to the only wartime publication of *Ons Leven*<sup>11</sup> and some brochures by the Flemish nationalist doctor Frans Daels, the lengthy essay *A Glance at the Soul of the Low Countries* (1916) by literary critic Jules Persyn was also published. Among the other features *SUB* printed were religious texts and literary series, as mentioned earlier often of doubtful quality. Some of them, such as *Refugeeliefde* by Floris Prims and *Lief en Leed – uit dagen van lijden*<sup>12</sup> by Karel Elebaers, a chaplain to the army, were subsequently published in book format. Proof of the transnational reach of the Belgian exile press in Britain, the second of these also appeared in *De Belgische Standaard*. In 1917, a collection of writings by soldiers, entitled *Soldatenpennen*, edited by Marcel Cordemans and introduced by Canon J. Muyldermans, was published via the distribution network of *SUB*.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout the war, *SUB* remained true to its Catholic origins and frequently the entire front page and most of the second page were used for texts that related to the Catholic religion and its traditions. A homily was often included. On 8th March 1918, virtually the entire front page was taken up by a letter by Monseigneur de Wachter. In the event of a particular Catholic feast or holiday, the religious pieces in the *SUB* took priority

over any war-related news, attempting to add to the imagined community in which conflict was only a distant sphere. The message was very clear: in order to survive the hardship and isolation of wartime exile, Belgians in Britain had to rely on the institutions of the Belgian Roman Catholic Church.

However, amidst the vast and wide-ranging chaos of a conflict that caused death, disruption and displacement, the contributions in *SUB* supported a sense of Belgianness in exile at the same times as confirming the fragmentation of the home nation whilst recording it all. When reading their exile journals, any Belgian in Britain would read about the hardships of occupation, about the horrors of the battles along the river Yser, or about refugee life elsewhere. The shattered sense of a nation must have been pervasive. And no political ideology, no religious conviction or no imagined sense of community in exile was able to soothe the overarching sense of displacement and sentiments of social and cultural trauma.<sup>14</sup>

## 2.2 *L'Indépendance Belge*

Unlike *De Stem Uit België*, which saw its first publication during the war, the second benchmark Belgian exile newspaper in Britain, *L'Indépendance Belge* (*LIB*), was an existing Belgian newspaper. Established in 1829, it was published as *L'Indépendant* until 1843 after which it became *L'Indépendance Belge*. Of a liberal orientation, *L'Indépendant/L'Indépendance Belge* was nonetheless positioned at the political centre. Moreover, until the official *Belgisch Staatsblad/Moniteur Belge* started appearing from 1845 onwards, *LIB* was the main outlet for communicating government decisions. The *LIB* motto was 'Conservation par le progrès', a motto suitable for the liberal conservatism that emanated from its pages. Increasing in reputation and appearing in a time of Belgium's colonial ambitions, the newspaper had become one of international repute, competing with *Le Temps* (Paris) and *The Times* (London) in the latter half of the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> *LIB* survived the invasion of Belgium by the Germans and the ensuing occupation by relocating to London, where it was published for the entire duration of the conflict. Throughout the war and its period of publication from London, *LIB* stayed loyal to its French-speaking readership and hardly ever included English, excepting the occasional instance of code-switching in the advertisements. After the war, it moved back to Brussels. Despite the fact that it had survived the First World War, it would not survive the Second World War: the last issue of *LIB* appeared on 13th May 1940, two days before the Germans entered the city.

At the start of the First World War, *LIB* was a daily newspaper printed in French and on 5th October 1914 its editorial address was still located at the Rue des Sables in Brussels. The newspaper listed additional offices in Ostend and Paris, which it had not had at the start of the war. In October 1914, it was not published for over a fortnight, but reappeared on 21st October, located at Tudor House in London.<sup>16</sup> As with *De Stem Uit België*, circulation figures varied. This often depended on how many copies the Belgian military had ordered. At times, these orders differed depending on how suitable the Belgian military authorities deemed the newspaper in question to be for maintaining morale among front-line soldiers and for safeguarding pro-Belgian sentiment among the population in exile. Overall, the reputation of *LIB* remained high, not least because of the continued support for the Belgian nation state at war.

The first issue of *LIB* to appear in exile included a poem by Emile Verhaeren, *Les Mots Anciens*, in which war is addressed in person. One of the leading articles, 'En exil', was printed to the left of the poem, and declaimed how the newspaper was not to be stopped either by war or occupation and how being in exile in England did not mean being in a country of strangers, but rather the contrary. Just how native England must have felt for the Belgian refugees was not made clear by such propagandistic claims. A second leading article, 'Pour L'Indépendance Belge', listed the names of prominent contributors, 'hommes éminents de la Belgique meurtrie, mais non vaincue', who included the socialist politician Jules Destrée and members of the Belgian parliament such as Maurice Féron, Paul Emile Janson and Romain Moyersoen. Other contributors of note were the authors Armand Varlez and Emile Cammaerts (the latter of whom had come to Britain prior to the war), the Belgian Minister of Justice Carton de Wiart, the liberal Member of the Belgian Parliament Paul Hymans, the socialist member of the Belgian Parliament Modeste Terwagne and the senator Henri La Fontaine. Three more articles on the front page deserve attention, not least a 'Bienvenue' by Prime Minister Asquith, which was in fact a brief welcoming statement in English, preceded by an editorial introduction in French. The cover page also included a letter by the journalist and diplomat Valentine Chirol, a friend of Lord Curzon, himself a friend of King Albert as well as guardian to the Belgian royal children in exile in Britain. A final and very striking part of the front page is an advertisement by Harrods, entirely in French, which not only stated that their 'étage des occasions générale' was the 'rendez-vous favori des dames belges et françaises' but also that 'un personnel d'interprètes se tient continuellement à la disposition des visiteurs'. As with other newspapers of the time, *LIB* also printed lists of names,



usually of Belgian soldiers convalescing in Britain. For instance, one such list concerned Belgian soldiers ‘actuellement confiés aux soins du Mayor de Whitby’ (*LIB*, 9.11.1914: 2). Typically the final page was divided into similar advertisements and listings, and messages from people looking for lost friends and relatives. Job and teaching offers were also included.

Many texts in *LIB* were about the war itself, sometimes lifted from other sources such as *La Libre Belgique*. When the war was over, *LIB* published the speech made by King Albert upon his return in full. Publishing such a speech would have seemed a matter of course before the war, in keeping with the patriotic sentiments of the start of the war, but after the Armistice it made more of a political statement, i.e. it confirmed the newspaper’s royalist and pro-Belgium point of view, and as such opposed Flemish nationalism.<sup>17</sup> The pre-war political divisions had intensified during the conflict, often along the lines of linguistic divides too, and this was very tangible from Belgian press after the war.

### 3 INCREASING ANTAGONISM AND FINDING AN AUDIENCE

The pre-war linguistic disposition of Belgium and its class divisions were extended across the war years in the Belgian wartime press and became more multifaceted through various new nuances and orientations, often inspired by the national setting in which Belgian exile newspapers appeared in Britain. This is evidenced by three things. First, by the continued workings of the *De Stem Uit België* bookshop, albeit in a different format. Second, by a Walloon cry for a francophone nation state. And third, by the mere fact that some of the publications that resulted from the Belgian exile press in wartime Britain were indeed published in Britain, rather than in Belgium where they should have been, or that they included a British element: this should have been an attempt to regain a sense of the Belgian home front.

On 1st April 1919, the *De Standaard* bookshop in Belgium started publishing books produced in exile by Frans van Cauwelaert and Julius Hoste in the Netherlands, and by Floris Prims and his bookshop.<sup>18</sup> The first ‘new’ publication of the company that was later to become the biggest bookshop and publishing company in Flanders was a book by the English architect G.A.T. Middleton. *Ypres as It Was Before the War* was printed in a French and Dutch translation and edited by Marcel Cordemans, soon to be editor-in-chief of *De Standaard*. A subsequent publication featured a letter by the Catholic author, Mathieu Rutten (Simons 1987: 6.). The main features of this publication combined elements such as Britain, war, destruction, Ypres,



architecture, and reconstruction of life in exile in Britain. It is clear that the Belgian nation state that several seminal individuals behind *SUB* were looking forward to was no longer, in fact, in place. All the fragmented parts had to come together again, and in their view, this could only be documented through analogies similar to those in John Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice*.

Although also an important newspaper in exile, *La Métropole d'Anvers* (*LMA*) played second fiddle to the two benchmark exile newspapers on two levels. First, with the majority of Belgian refugees in Britain being Catholic and about three quarters originating in Flanders—that is to say, Dutch-speaking—refugees from Flanders were accommodated by the equally Catholic but also Flemish *SUB*. The French-speaking audience addressed by *LMA* was to some extent accommodated by the fellow francophone *LIB*. *LMA*, an existing Catholic francophone newspaper from Antwerp, appeared in Britain from 22nd October 1914 until 9th March 1919.<sup>19</sup> Initially, *LMA* appeared as a supplement to *The London Standard*. As *The Standard* had been including notices in French for Belgian refugees from early September onwards, this fitted in with a clear editorial strategy. However, the policy did not last and the first independent issue of *LMA* was published on 5th April 1916.<sup>20</sup> *The Standard* nonetheless continued to print information for or about Belgian refugees in both English and French. By the end of 1916, *LMA* was for sale at about 280 distribution points outside London, clearly still drawing on the *Standard's* distribution network. Earlier in the war, on 17th November 1914, *LMA*, still included in *The London Standard*, reported on the appearance of *Le Cri de Londres*, based in Westminster. During the early stages of the war, Hubert Colleye wrote for *Le Cri de Londres* and, after the war, he became one of the post-war editors of *LMA*. On 15th June 1915, Colleye concludes a contribution to *Le Cri de Londres* with the sentence 'La Belgique de demain sera Latine ou elle ne sera pas', which prompted waves of support in Belgicist circles as well as among Walloon activists, and such sincere indignation among Flemish nationalists that even more moderate nationalists felt offended. The fact that the German newspaper, the *Kölnische Zeitung*, which was closely affiliated to the German government, reported on the increasing linguistic friction in the Belgian community, even while in exile, did not help Colleye's reputation in many political circles (Yammine: 231). Nonetheless, in 1916, Colleye started *L'Opinion Wallonne*, an exile journal for Walloon separatists, operating from Paris. Just how lasting the friction between the various Belgian factions was and whether Britain provided an outlet for many of those involved, was proven by Alfons van de Perre—the man

behind *SUB*—who published a pamphlet in Britain on the linguistic divide in Belgium, which was in part an answer to Colleye (van de Perre 1919).

How much the Belgian communities in exile in Britain considered their exile as part of their Belgian identity can be seen through more publications. One of the Belgian refugees in Britain was the Walloon author and poet Paul Gérardy, who in 1917 published *Une Cité Belge Sur La Tamise* under the name of Justin Wallon. Printed on behalf of the Belgian exile newspaper *La Neptune*, Gérardy/Wallon recounted the story of the Belgian community in Twickenham/Richmond.<sup>21</sup> The same publishing company, Librarie Moderne, which was based in Brussels but in wartime operated from London, published *Les Belges en Exil* in 1917, by Armand Varlez. He dedicated his book not to the Belgians in Britain, but to the Flemish and Walloon exiles. With a focus on the linguistic differences in Belgium, as represented by the Belgian exile community, the overall common denominator was still a sense of Belgian identity, albeit a fragmented one. This approach was a pre-existing one. As early as 1916, a Belgian lawyer from Brussels, Fernand Passelecq, head of the Bureau Documentaire Belge in Le Havre,<sup>22</sup> published a book entitled *Belgian Unity and the Flemish Movement* about the relationship between the Belgian nation and the nationalist tendencies arising from its linguistically diverse communities, in this case Flanders.

#### 4 ARMISTICE: WHEN PENS FALL SILENT

With the Armistice, the situation of destitution and despair that was the First World War changed dramatically, at least along the western front. Soon British troops were returning home on the same ships that would take Belgian refugees back to their homeland. There, the reality of reconstruction awaited them, not only the reconstruction of infrastructure and logistics, but also of a society that no one had anticipated during the war years, least of all the Belgian exile press. Despite all the good intentions behind the repatriation funds and meeting of minds between Belgian architects and the Garden City movement for instance, the sheer scale of post-war reconstruction defied anyone's expectations. With the termination of hostilities there was also a noticeable shift in reporting and the need for recording. Many of the wartime journals ceased publication altogether.

Whether they disappeared from view altogether or not remained less of an issue in at least one respect. During the war, parts of the Belgian exile press had already been focusing on the failure of the guarantees that had

been offered by the Great Powers and Allies as early as 1915. Several pieces in different Belgian exile journals even demanded ‘the return of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and [...] those parts of the old Austrian Netherlands and prince-bishopric of Liège which had been ceded to the Prussians or the Dutch between 1715 and 1839. This outright ‘annexationist agitation [...] severely strained Belgian relations with the Netherlands and Luxembourg, and even with some of the Allied Powers’ (Arblaster 2012: 214), and this to such an extent that these claims undermined the negotiating position of Belgium at Versailles and resulted in much fewer territorial changes than Belgium intended. In all, the friction appearing in the pages of the Belgian wartime exile press and extending beyond the borders of the fragmented Belgian society is perhaps the starkest legacy of the multifaceted chapter that was the Belgian exile press, in this case the one appearing in Britain.

Note 1: parts of this chapter were based on the exile press in Britain chapter from my Ph.D. However, these have been substantially altered.

Note 2: Bibliographical references to newspapers are in the endnotes only, not in the reference section.

### Newspapers and Magazines

*Anglo-Belgian Exports, Belgisch Dagblad, De Belgische Standaard, De Dageraad, De Stem Uit België, De Vlaamsche Stem, Het Vaderland, L'Écho Belge, L'Écho d'Anvers, L'Indépendance Belge, L'Opinion wallonne, La Belgique Nouvelle, La Belgique, La Dépêche, La Métropole d'Anvers, La Nation Belge, La Nouvelle Belgique, La Patrie Belge, La Tribune Congolaise, Le Courrier Belge/De Belgische Koerier, Le Courrier de l'Armée/De Legerbode, Le Courrier de la Meuse, Le Franco-Belge (de Folkestone), Le Socialiste Belge/De Belgische Socialist, Le Sport Belge, Le XXIème Siècle, Les Nouvelles, Neptune (d'Anvers), Notre Belgique, Ons Vaderland, Ons Vlaanderen, Questions – La Revue Belge/The Belgian Review, The Anglo-Belgian Trade Review, The Birtley Echo, Vrij België.*

### NOTES

1. In his ‘Lettre au Roi – Séparation de la Wallonie et de la Flandre’, the Belgian socialist politician Jules Destrée (1863–1936) openly posited the linguistic disposition of Belgium (‘Sire, vous réglez sur deux peuples. Il y

- a en Belgique des Wallons et des Flamands, il n'y a pas de Belges'). He also found that, of those Belgians aged 15 and older, 41% spoke Flemish and 41.5% spoke French. An additional 14.7% spoke both languages. A remaining 2.7% spoke German or a combination of two or three languages that included German (Destrée 1912).
2. See, for example, 'King Albert of Belgium a Hero of All Europe', *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12.11.1914, p. 2.
  3. 'Brave Little Belgium', along with related labels such as 'Gallant' and 'Plucky' but also 'Poor', was first used at the start of the war by *The Times* on 7 August 1914 (p. 4). For an appreciation of propagandistic labels in relation to Belgium, see Declercq (2016a: 97–99).
  4. For Belgian clandestine press, see Massart (1917) and François Hirsch (2006). For an analysis of Flemish trench newspapers, see Delaey (2012).
  5. The London Office of the *XXme Siècle* was based near Leicester Square.
  6. Another contributor to *De Stem* was Hilaire Allaey. Allaey was a close friend of August Borms, a Flemish nationalist who collaborated with the Germans during both world wars.
  7. Although not overtly an activist, Jules Callewaert adhered to the Flemish cause. For this, Callewaert was exiled to Ireland for two years by his superiors. However, the existing nationalist struggles on the island only intensified Callewaert's own political ideas concerning Flemish nationalism.
  8. See Marcel Cordemans's biography of van de Perre, published in 1963.
  9. 'Soldiers' pens and English Studies' [author's own translation].
  10. Like *Vrij België*, an exile newspaper published in Amsterdam by a group spearheaded by Frans Van Cauwelaert and Julius Hoste Jr., *De Stem Uit België* was a popular paper among soldiers, including those at the front.
  11. *Ons Leven* is a magazine of the Catholic Flemish student movement, and is still in existence today. One of the leaders of the Catholic student union at the time was Alfons de Groeve, who became a publisher in exile in the Netherlands during the war and published some works through the *SUB* bookshop.
  12. 'Love and sorrow—days of suffering' [author's own translation].
  13. The 240 pages of soldiers' stories are cited by Jean Weisgerber and Mathieu Rutten as further proof of an existing war literature in Belgium (Weisgerber and Rutten, eds. 1988: 258).
  14. All the more peculiar is that its main financial backer, Alfons van de Perre, initiated writing a chain of letters and texts that would become the Front Movement, a group of people in favour of more rights for Flemish soldiers and by extension Flemish people. The Front letters to King Albert by several soldiers lay at the core of this movement. They denounced the situation whereby Flemish soldiers, typically lower rank and Dutch-speaking only, were to respond to Walloon officers, typically French-speaking. Prior

- to the Front letters, Dr. van de Perre, a Belgian MP, had published a piece in *De Stem Uit België* in response to the news that, out of 800 new recruits for the Belgian army, fewer than 10 had come from Wallonia. For more on this matter, see Vanacker (2003).
15. *LIB* was used as a source in House of Lords discussions and as a reference for reporting on post-war Belgian political sentiments (such as the fact that the main seat of the League of Nations was established in Geneva and not in Brussels). *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, HL, 27th January 1860, vol. 156, cols. 214–219. *The Times*, 19.4.1919, p. 9.
  16. While away from German-occupied Brussels, *LIB* was published first in Ghent and then in Ostend.
  17. An English translation of this speech appeared in *The New York Times* of 29.12.1918.
  18. By the end of 1918, Jan Albert Goris was Alfons van de Perre's private secretary. Goris became involved with the post-war *De Standaard* and grew into a popular author in Flanders where he was known as Marnix Gijsen.
  19. Along with *La Flandre Libérale* and *Le Matin (d'Anvers)*, *La Métropole d'Anvers* was one of the three main newspapers printed in French in Flanders before the war, but *LMA* was of a distinctively conservative Catholic tone.
  20. The copy in the British Library has a note stating '1st number published in London'. However, this contrasts with Massart 1917, in which the first publication is dated 8th April 1915.
  21. A British publication resembling Wallon's, but concerned the Belgian community at Earl's Court, was G.A. Powel's, *Four Years in a Refugee Camp*, n.d. [1920].
  22. For more information on the Bureau Documentaire Belge, see R. Depoortere: [http://search.arch.be/cad/pdf/BE-A0510\\_000369\\_002668\\_DUT.ead.pdf](http://search.arch.be/cad/pdf/BE-A0510_000369_002668_DUT.ead.pdf).

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## Trapped in Occupied Brussels: Roberto J. Payró's War Experience, 1914–1915

*María Inés Tato*

Yo no puedo ver, en efecto, sino un pequenísimo rincón del escenario en que se desarrolla este drama colosal, rincón más reducido aún por el aislamiento en que el invasor nos mantiene y que estrecha cada día. Pero lo que (...) este Diario refleja con mayor o menor intensidad es la serie de emociones que se apoderan de nuestro ánimo, en estos días terribles, con las sensaciones que despiertan en nosotros las vicisitudes de la vida diaria, es la manera de ver y de sentir esa vida misma desde nuestro sitio de observación, abarcando tan limitado campo visual y sujetos aún a errores y aberraciones que por ahora no es posible comprobar.

[In fact, I can see only a very small corner of the scenery in which this colossal drama takes place. A corner made even smaller by the isolation the invader forces upon us and which it tightens every day. But what (...) this diary reflects, with greater or lesser intensity, is the range of emotions that take over our minds in these terrible days, with the feelings that the vicissitudes of daily events awaken in us; the way we see and feel that self-same life from our observation post, reaching such a limited field of vision and still subject to errors and aberrations that cannot yet be verified.] (Roberto J. Payró, 1915)<sup>1</sup>

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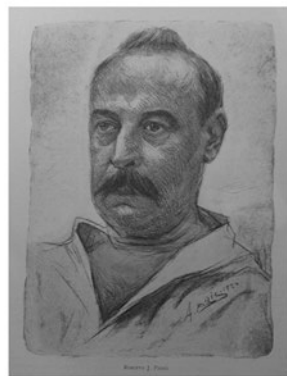
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Thus reflected the celebrated Argentine writer Roberto J. Payró (1867–1928) upon his daily experience under the German occupation of Brussels. He had settled down in the Belgian capital in 1909, working as a correspondent for the Buenos Aires newspaper *La Nación*. Payró was the author of remarkable accounts of social customs, characterized by his deeply ironic style. His talent as a perceptive observer of social reality was clearly shown in his role as a journalist for *La Nación*, which at that stage had a daily circulation of around 100,000 copies and was the second most read newspaper in Argentina (Le Rose 1913: 63 f.). Payró was renowned as a pioneer of travel chronicles in Argentina<sup>2</sup> and, after moving to Brussels with his family, as one of the newspaper's most prominent foreign correspondents. His contributions presented his impressions of various aspects of Belgian culture, politics, economy and history. They were published in columns headed 'Cartas informativas' [Informative Letters] and 'Visiones y lecturas' [Insights and Readings]. He also collected Walloon and Flemish folk traditions that were published after his death under the title *El diablo en Bélgica* [The Devil in Belgium].

At the outbreak of the Great War, Payró decided to stay in Belgium to offer his readers a first-hand account of events.<sup>3</sup> His journalistic contributions were based on his personal diary, and covered the period from the eve of the war until February 1915. They were published by *La Nación* in 109 issues between September 1914 and September 1915.<sup>4</sup> Payró's war chronicles have been analysed from different points of view, emphasizing their journalistic value and their place in his literary career, as well as his role as cultural mediator between the horrors of the war and his Argentine readers.<sup>5</sup> However, like any self-document, they also provide access to the impact of the war upon the individual and its interrelationship with collective perceptions (de Schaepdrijver 2014b:15). In this vein, this chapter explores Payró's corpus of wartime writings from the perspective of the history of emotions.<sup>6</sup> As he asserted in the quotation that opens this chapter, restricted access to information limited how much he knew about the development of the war. However, his writings offer insightful remarks about emotions and daily life in Brussels during wartime, and are an invaluable contribution to understanding how the Belgian population lived through the tragedy of the war. The history of emotions is a perspective particularly useful for studying individual and social experiences in traumatic situations, such as wars, when violence and feeling are closely intertwined, and the intensity of emotions is amplified (Downes et al. 2015: 6). It is within this context that this chapter will examine the formation of a "war culture" under the experience of the German invasion and occupation of Belgium (Fig. 8.1).<sup>7</sup>

**Fig. 8.1** Payró's portrait

## 1 WAR IS COMING

Prior to the outbreak of hostilities, Belgian public opinion was indifferent to international events developing in Europe, and was focused on other matters, such as the Mme. Caillaux affair. But the outbreak of the Great War did not take Payró by surprise (Payró 2009: 581–585).<sup>8</sup> In fact, he had predicted it in 1912, when the escalation of conflicts in the Balkans led him to foresee the involvement of the European powers and the possible violation of Belgium's neutrality (ibid., 272–275).<sup>9</sup> In July 1914, the alarm caused by the crisis between Austria and Serbia led him to meticulously examine the news and rumours that were spread in Brussels, concluding that 'todo esto huele a pólvora' [all this smells of gunpowder] (ibid., 582). Throughout his chronicles, Payró described the distressing atmosphere that surrounded the eve of the war: the pre-emptive mobilization of the Belgian army; the repatriation of German and French reserve officers; pacifist demonstrations, such as those held at the Royal Circus, where Jean Jaurès delivered a passionate speech (ibid., 597 f.)<sup>10</sup>; the stationing of German troops along the Belgian borders; stock market panic; bank runs; compulsive hoarding of provisions by civilians; an increasing number of newspaper editions; and the paralysis of commerce—all signs of 'la inminencia de una gran catástrofe' [the imminence of a tremendous catastrophe] (ibid., 600).<sup>11</sup> The invasion of Luxembourg by German troops on 2nd August brought about the rapid response of Belgian reservists, the enlistment of large numbers of volunteers in the army and the enrolment of women in the Red Cross (ibid., 606 f.).

After the invasion of Belgium on 4th August and the violation of the country's neutrality, the search for reliable information encountered

numerous obstacles, such as the control of information by the government and press self-censorship. Payró denounced the growing isolation of Belgian society:

Las comunicaciones son difíciles si no imposibles: el teléfono solo funciona para las autoridades militares, con Luxemburgo no hay medio de comunicación, a Francia solo pasan los telegramas urgentes, y eso con grandes retardos, los puestos de telegrafía sin hilos están severamente prohibidos. [Communications are difficult or impossible: the telephone only works for the military authorities, there is no contact with Luxembourg, only urgent telegrams reach France, and then after great delay, wireless telegraphy stations are totally forbidden.] (Payró 2009: 616f.)

The Argentine writer exhibited a permanent distrust of the authenticity of the official information circulating in the city to which thousands of refugees from eastern Belgium had fled. Thus, faced with reports of the presence of German troops near Brussels, Payró wondered:

¿Será verdad que el invasor se halla tan próximo, mientras las noticias oficiales nos lo pintan en retirada, rechazado en todas partes? ¿O el miedo, hace, como siempre, ver visiones? ¿Quién nos ha engañado, el gobierno o los que vienen a refugiarse en Bruselas? [Could it be true that the invader is so close, while the official news describe it retreating, repelled everywhere? Or, as always, fear produces hallucinations? Who has deceived us, the government or those who come to seek refuge in Brussels?] (Payró 2009: 662)<sup>12</sup>

However, testimonies of neighbours and reading between the lines of official statements convinced him that it was clear that the Germans were at the gates of Brussels (*ibid.*, 663).

## 2 UNDER GERMAN RULE

In spite of all signs to the contrary, Payró refused to believe that the Germans had entered the city on 20th August. In his diary, he reported briefly on the pace of the platoons and the flying of the German flag on the town hall building (Payró 2009: 680).<sup>13</sup> On the next day, his incredulity persisted, and he recorded:

Nadie ha podido dormir tranquilo y todos nos levantamos muy temprano con la loca esperanza de que las cosas hayan cambiado radicalmente desde anoche, y de que los alemanes no estén ya en Bruselas. [Nobody has been

able to sleep peacefully, and all of us woke up very early with the crazy hope that things have radically changed since last night, and that Germans are no longer in Brussels.] (Payró 2009: 680)<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, the number of German troops increased, the first German edict was published and the requisitions started on 21st August (Payró 2009: 680). The isolation deepened further after the German occupation of the city, leading Payró to assert the following:

Estamos en una cárcel, separados completamente del mundo. Lo ignoramos todo, hasta lo que pasa en la misma Bruselas. [We are in a prison, separated completely from the world. We know nothing, even what happens in Brussels itself.] (Payró 2009: 682)<sup>15</sup>

Payró's scepticism regarding the news disseminated by the German occupying authorities was intense, and he considered their accounts to be implausible:

Estamos condenados a no tener más noticias que las que los alemanes quieren darnos en sus carteles. (...) ni mueren, ni son heridos, ni retroceden nunca. Siguen adelante en todas partes, invencibles, sin recibir un rasguño, conquistando pueblos, provincias y países con sólo presentarse. [We are doomed to have no more news than what the Germans want to transmit to us in their posters. (...) they advance, invincible, without a scratch, conquering towns, provinces and countries by their mere presence.] (Payró 2009: 845)<sup>16</sup>

Anxiety about the war stimulated the emergence of a clandestine news market, where newspapers from Belgian cities not occupied by German troops or from neighbouring countries such as the Netherlands, France or Great Britain, were sold at exorbitant prices, which reflected the high risk of an activity severely punished by the occupation authorities (Payró 2009: 846). Payró supposed that those publications entered the city with the supply of foodstuffs (*ibid.*, 847). Many typewritten pages were also circulated, reproducing extracts from different journals (*ibid.*, 951),<sup>17</sup> as well as ephemeral newspapers, which were, according to Payró:

Hojas incoloras, porque dicen algo y los alemanes las suprimen o no dicen nada y los belgas las desdeñan. [Colourless sheets, because they say something and the Germans suppress them, or they say nothing and the Belgians reject them.] (Payró 2009: 121f.)

Social unrest about the war also fuelled speculation and guesswork, and led to the omnipresence of rumour in Brussels life (de Schaepdrijver 2006: 75 f.). Although rumours were frequently alarming, they also expressed the need for certainty, for making sense of a distressing situation, for providing hope, and for finding a strategy for survival.<sup>18</sup> Payró constantly pointed out the abundance of unverified information, some credible but most of it absurd, as a result of the shortage of reliable evidence:

A falta de datos positivos siguen circulando rumores que no consignaré, porque su falta de fundamento es evidente. [In the absence of positive data, rumours continue circulating; I will not register them because of their clear groundlessness.] (Payró 2009: 683)<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, Payró considered them to be well-meaning in character:

Sospecho que más de un patriota se preocupa de poner en circulación rumores optimistas, para contrarrestar el efecto producido en el pueblo por los carteles alemanes, que cantan sin cesar el triunfo de sus armas. Entre estos patriotas, habrá, sin duda, algunos mejor intencionados que ilustrados y a éstos debemos las noticias inverosímiles que nos llegan casi todos los días. Otros, los menos, aciertan, gracias a sus conocimientos y a su inteligencia, a mantenerse dentro de las posibilidades y hacer aceptar sus invenciones hasta por los escépticos. [I suspect that more than one patriot tries to circulate optimistic rumours to counteract the effect of the German posters, which endlessly sing of the triumph of their arms. Among those patriots, there will be undoubtedly some better intentioned than learned, and we owe to them the unlikely news received every day. Others—the minority—because of their knowledge and intelligence are able to stay within the bounds of possibility and to make even the sceptics accept their inventions.] (Payró 2009: 850)<sup>20</sup>

War and occupation instilled new social habits and emotional practices, directly related to the conflict and anxiety for news, and the emergence of new collective interactions. The discussion of rumours and clandestine press became almost a social liturgy, and occupied a considerable amount of the people's time in Brussels:

Nunca falta quien, no habiendo podido procurarse el diario, acude a preguntar lo que dice, reanudando así la conversación iniciada en la mañana, y que ocupa la tarde, hasta la hora de salir. Se sale al fin, con el propósito de

distraerse siquiera un momento, paseando por los alrededores; pero (...) la preocupación es demasiado profunda para poder apartarla, y los pies nos conducen subconscientemente hasta el tranvía que ha de llevarnos a la reunión cotidiana de amigos “bien informados”, en la que se discuten con animación, a veces acaloradamente, los últimos sucesos, durante horas enteras (...). A la hora de comer sería de un negro egoísmo no repetir en casa lo que, bueno o malo, falso o verídico, se ha cosechado fuera, y apenas se acaba de vaciar el saco, llega invariablemente algún otro grupo de amigos con quienes forzoso es volver a empezar. [There is always someone who, not having been able to get the newspaper, goes to ask what it says, resuming the conversation initiated in the morning, and that takes up the afternoon, until time to leave. One finally leaves, with the purpose of getting some distraction, even for a moment, walking around, but (...) one's worry is too deep to be able to get it out of one's head, and our feet subconsciously lead us to the tramway that will take us to the daily meeting of ‘well-informed’ friends, where the latest events are animatedly—sometimes excitedly—discussed for hours (...). At dinner, it would be black selfishness not to repeat at home what—good or bad, true or false—has been gleaned outside, and when you have barely finished emptying the sack, another group of friends invariably comes, and it inevitably starts again.] (Payró 2009: 699f.)<sup>21</sup>

The Argentine chronicler observed that war became the only obsession of society, leading to an unhealthy collective nervousness:

Monomaniacos de la Guerra, dormimos en plena acción militar, y el cerebro sigue el impulso recibido durante todo el día, fingiéndonos batallas y matanzas, incendios y saqueos, fusilamientos y violaciones. [Monomaniacs of war, we are in full military action when asleep, and our brains continue processing the impulses they have received during the day, feigning battles and massacres, fires and sackings, executions and rapes.] (Payró 2009: 700f.)<sup>22</sup>

Payró noted that profound changes had taken place in society and individual mindsets. People seemed less friendly, less expansive, suspicious, quick to get annoyed, worried and unsettled (ibid.). Both sexes and all social classes were affected. Women read military novels, *War and Peace* by Tolstoy, *La Débâcle* by Zola<sup>23</sup> and Erckmann-Chatrian's stories.<sup>24</sup> Educated men studied military organization, the treaties of alliance, and recent diplomatic history, and they would chase after the few underground newspapers available in Brussels (Payró 2009: 698 f.).<sup>25</sup>

Payró observed the drastic disruption to traditional social routines after the German invasion:

El aspecto de la ciudad es de una tristeza infinita. De los bulevares han desaparecido las ‘terrazas’, las mesas y las sillas instaladas en plena acera y que tanta animación les prestaban. [The appearance of the city is of infinite sadness. In the boulevards and terraces, tables and chairs once installed right on the pavements, which provided such liveliness, have disappeared.] (Payró 2009: 821)<sup>26</sup>

War had an ‘acoustic imprint’ and drowned out all other noise (McLoughlin 2011: 23). Thus, music was virtually banished in grief for war, acquiring an unusual value as an indicator of the social mood:

(...) la burguesía no tiene tampoco dinero para músicas, y aunque lo tuviese, en ninguna casa belga se oye sonar un piano ni un violín, como demostración de luto y de protesta. [(...) the bourgeoisie has no money for music, and if had it, neither piano nor violin are heard in any Belgian house, as a demonstration of mourning and protest]. (Payró 2009: 854)<sup>27</sup>

There were no concerts, and the theatres and cinemas were closed. Society lived in expectation of the sound of cannons, for signs of the advance of the military operations, and even seemed to regulate social activity:

Se piensa en descansar cuando el cañón no truena a lo lejos, porque entonces se le escucha tratando de interpretar su voz y penetrar el misterio de la noche y la distancia. ¿Qué dice? ¿Contra quién ruge? ¿Nos amenaza? ¿Nos anuncia la liberación? [One thinks about resting when the cannon does not boom in the distance, because when it does, one tries to interpret its voice and to penetrate the mystery of night and distance. What does it say? Against whom is it roaring? Is it threatening us? Is it promising liberation?] (Payró 2009: 700)<sup>28</sup>

A natural-born journalist, Payró was eager to get trustworthy information about the German invasion and the atrocities they were committing. He needed to overcome the obstacles created by the lack of news and by Brussels’ unusual situation. In effect, the presence of foreign diplomats in the Belgian capital attenuated the more violent traits displayed by the invader in other areas of the country (Payró 2009: 888),<sup>29</sup> showing that occupation experiences differed according to the place (de Schaepdrijver 2006: 116).<sup>30</sup> Brussels thus enjoyed an exceptional regime, extremely benign when compared with that experienced by other unfortunate towns (Payró 2009: 913).<sup>31</sup> Payró’s son Roberto, who enlisted in the Red Cross

as a stretcher-bearer, provided him with first-hand accounts of the destruction that he found in his path. At his father's request, he put his experiences in writing, which were reproduced in Payró's diary and shared with the readers of *La Nación* (ibid., 823–832).<sup>32</sup>

### 3 PAYRÓ'S JOURNEYS

Payró was determined to get as full a picture as possible of the real situation of the war for himself. Taking advantage of a temporary relaxation of restrictions on the free movement of people, he obtained through a friend of his (whose identity he kept secret, probably a diplomat), permission from the German authorities to travel around the region comprising Brussels, Antwerp and Louvain/Leuven, accompanied by several people. The journey was made by car and included numerous stops (see Fig. 8.2 below). Checks by German sentries were facilitated by the fluent German spoken by Payró's son, who was in charge of presenting the passports (Payró 2009: 711).<sup>33</sup>



Fig. 8.2 Payró's journeys (Map by Paulo Gonzalo Pires)



In his ‘Peregrinación a las Ruinas’ [Pilgrimage to the Ruins], as he entitled his contributions, Payró recorded with dismay a landscape ravaged by the new warfare techniques. Eppegem was the first location in their itinerary that Payró and his companions found destroyed:

No se veía un alma. No se oía un rumor. Era la soledad de una ruina antigua, sin belleza, y el corazón comenzó a oprimírsenos ante ese primer cuadro de la guerra moderna. [Not a soul was seen. Not a sound was heard. It has the solitude of an ancient ruin, without beauty, and our hearts began to grieve for this first scene of modern warfare.] (Payró 2009: 711)

Later on, he compared Antwerp to a cemetery where only forgotten corpses rest (Payró 2009: 713). During his journey, Payró contrasted the devastated places with his own memories of them, wondering with nostalgia:

¿Cómo describirlos? ¿Cómo variar la monótona repetición de las mismas palabras: ruinas, escombros, montones de ruinas, hacinamiento de escombros? [How to describe them? How to vary the monotonous repetition of the same words: ruins, debris, loads of ruins, heaping up of debris?] (Payró 2009: 717)<sup>34</sup>

Payró described his feelings during his ‘dolorosa peregrinación’ [painful pilgrimage] as stupefaction, desolation, horror and anguish (Payró 2009: 711–718).<sup>35</sup> During and after the journey, silence reigned among the companions, in keeping with the incommunicable and ineffable character of their personal perceptions, and the unavailability of words capable of conveying the emotions awakened by the spectacle of destruction<sup>36</sup>: ‘El único monótono comentario que se nos escapaba era: “¡Qué horror! ¡qué horror!”’ [The only monotonous comment that we let out was: ‘How awful! How awful!’] (Payró 2009: 713)<sup>37</sup> Payró later likened their anguished and silent return to Brussels to Dante stargazing as a reaction to the horror of hell (ibid., 718).<sup>38</sup>

In spite of this distressing experience, a few days later Payró undertook a trip to Amsterdam to deliver his correspondence to *La Nación* and to arrange subsequent dispatches,<sup>39</sup> meeting again the grimmest realities of war. He went from Brussels to Moelingen by car and, after crossing the border, to Maastricht by foot, there taking a train to Amsterdam (see Fig. 8.2) (Payró 2009: 744–755).<sup>40</sup> On this new journey, he once more encountered signs of the catastrophe, ‘pero mis ojos estaban ya habituados

a las ruinas, y el sentimiento se amortigua por la costumbre' [but my eyes were already used to the ruins, and the feeling is mitigated by habit] (ibid., 745).<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, he registered the complete contrast between Brussels' gloomy daily routine and the animation of Amsterdam and The Hague. This brief contact with Dutch society offered him an ephemeral return to normality, a gust of fresh air for the asphyxiated (ibid.), a brief respite from the pressure cooker (ibid., 911).<sup>42</sup>

This experience opened Payró's eyes to the reality of the isolation in which Brussels found itself:

Allí vi con espanto el triangulito que quedaba de Bélgica y en que combate el rey a la cabeza de su minúsculo ejército; allí vi que la línea de los aliados estaba lejos, muy lejos (...). Y [allí comprendí] que habíamos estado forjándonos ficciones sin un átomo de fundamento (...). [There I saw with horror the small triangle that remains of Belgium, where the king fights at the head of his tiny army; there I saw that the line of the Allies was far, far away (...). And I understood that we have been fabricating fictions without foundation (...).] (Payró 2009: 912)<sup>43</sup>

#### 4 AN INTERRUPTED DIARY

Payró's denunciation of the violence of the German occupation in *La Nación* prompted German diplomats and businessmen in Buenos Aires to alert the occupation authorities in Brussels to his reports (Payró 2009: 631 f.).<sup>44</sup> They had a great impact on Argentine public opinion, especially his chronicles about two victims of German violence closely related to his homeland (Horne and Kramer 2011: 84). The first of these cases, personally investigated by Payró at the site of the event by interviewing the victim's relatives and eyewitnesses, and by collecting information directly from the Argentine minister in Brussels, Alberto Blancas, and from the Argentine military attaché, Lorenzo Bravo, was the execution of Rémy Himmer at Dinant. As well as being the director of a local textile factory, Himmer acted as honorary vice-consul of the Argentine Republic in Dinant—a position he stated upon his arrest but which did not spare him execution. Furthermore, the Argentine flag and the coat of arms of the consulate were destroyed, its building was plundered and consular archives burnt (Payró 2009: 632–641). The Argentine government ordered its legations in Brussels, Berlin and The Hague to investigate the case. The Minister in Brussels detailed the episode in full and put forward supporting documentation, but the government was satisfied with the explanation

given to the Argentine legation in Berlin by the Imperial Department of Foreign Affairs of Germany, which denied that the German troops were aware of Himmer's diplomatic status or any offence against national symbols. Consequently, there was no diplomatic conflict at all (Lanús 2001: 65–67). The second case studied by the chronicler was that of the vice-consul and ambassador of the General Argentine Consulate in Antwerp, Julio Lemaire, who died as a consequence of the German bombardment of the city (Payró 2009: 641 f.),<sup>45</sup> a case that had no impact whatsoever on Argentine–German relations. As a consequence of Payró's reports (ibid.),<sup>46</sup> on 22nd September 1915 his home on Brugmann Avenue was raided twice, many of his writings were commandeered<sup>47</sup> and he was put under house arrest and strict surveillance for the rest of the war. His contributions to *La Nación* consequently ceased until the end of the conflict. In effect, only in February 1919 did the newspaper resume publication of his new chronicles, some of which collected his memories of the occupation. Among them, it is worth mentioning an account of the forced transfer of Belgian workers to Germany, and a report on the clandestine press.<sup>48</sup>

The Allied victory caught Payró by surprise, probably as a result of the combination of the occupier's control over the flow of information, which installed the myth of German invincibility (de Schaepdrijver 2006: 238) and the complex nature of wartime, experienced as open-ended and endless, as a 'perpetual present' (McLoughlin 2011: 107 f.). Payró depicted his astonishment and his mixed feelings about the end of the war as follows:

Pese a las fiestas ruidosas, a las revistas brillantes, al paso de las tropas agueridas, a las manifestaciones (...) a los vítores, las músicas y los aplausos, fuerza es confesar que no habíamos salido aún completamente de nuestro estupor y que no nos dábamos exacta cuenta del milagro (...). El paso de las sombras a la luz ha sido harto brusco para no dejarnos deslumbrados. (...) La horrible pesadilla había durado cincuenta y dos meses y no era posible ahuyentar de un golpe sus fantasmas. [In spite of the noisy festivities, the brilliant reviews, the pace of the brave troops, the demonstrations (...) the cheers, the music and applause, it must be confessed that we were still in a stupor and we had not become completely aware of the miracle (...) The crossing from the shadows into the light has been extremely abrupt and left us dazzled. (...) The horrible nightmare had lasted fifty-two months, and it was not possible to banish its ghosts all at once.] (Payró 2009: 1045)

## 5 CONCLUSION

Roberto J. Payró portrayed the individual and social emotions around the experience of the German occupation of Brussels during the Great War, which gave shape to the emergence of a war culture. The violation of Belgian neutrality, the atrocities, the devastation of towns and villages, and the severity of German rule all contributed to its emergence, centred on the idea of national unity, of the 'sacred union' to defend the outraged fatherland, which was accepted even by the (formerly pacifist) socialists. In Payró's words:

Bélgica no forma sino una sola individualidad, animada de un solo propósito: ¡defender su independencia, defender su libertad! [Belgium constitutes one and only one entity, animated by only one purpose: defending its independence, defending its freedom!] (Payró 2009: 610)<sup>49</sup>

The first expressions of anti-German sentiment on the eve of the conflict (Payró 2009: 621 and 672)<sup>50</sup> were reinforced after the invasion and occupation by the invaders' excessive ferocity (ibid., 657)<sup>51</sup> which instilled a long-lasting legacy of hatred (ibid., 807f).<sup>52</sup> Instead of being demoralized, the Belgian people reacted to every new outrage with a heightened determination to defeat their oppressor. Payró seemed to consider the war experience as having acted as a catalyst for the true nature of individuals and societies, and made their best qualities emerge: courage, self-sacrifice and resilience. The Belgian's tragedy made them into heroes and victims:

(...) [el pueblo] guardaba, sin embargo, inagotables reservas de energía, de patriotismo, de inteligencia, de abnegación, que sólo pedían una oportunidad para, en bien de la comunidad, derramarse como raudal fecundo. [...] people kept inexhaustible reserves of energy, patriotism, intelligence, abnegation, which only demanded an opportunity to spill over in fertile abundance for the good of the community.] (Payró 2009: 779)<sup>53</sup>

In Payró's chronicles, those virtues were paradigmatically represented by three outstanding figures. In the first place was the Mayor of Brussels, Adolphe Max (1869–1939), who refused to cooperate with the occupation authorities and was finally deported to Germany (Payró 2009: 779).<sup>54</sup> In second place was Cardinal Mercier (1851–1926), whose pastoral letter was almost a manifesto for resistance against the Germans (ibid., 1025–1030).<sup>55</sup> Finally, there was an anonymous hero, an elderly man, to

whom Payró gave the fictitious name of Monsieur Dagimont, to protect his identity, who acted as a link between the Belgian soldiers and their families, delivering their letters in person (*ibid.*, 999–1021).<sup>56</sup>

Payró was not only an exceptional eyewitness of the invasion and occupation of Belgium, but also an active player who exhibited a high degree of commitment to the Belgian cause. As a journalist, he publicly denounced in the Argentine press the abuses and outrages of the German occupation authorities. He also took part in a fundraising initiative to assist Belgian victims, organized in October 1914 by the American businessman Dannie Heineman, who convened several diplomats from neutral states.<sup>57</sup> On that occasion, Payró was in charge of inviting his Argentine readers to collect money, clothes and food for the Belgian people (*ibid.*, 883).<sup>58</sup> In addition, his wife joined the Red Cross as a volunteer nurse and his eldest son as a stretcher-bearer. According to his grandson, the German authorities tried to establish a connection between Payró and the activities of Edith Cavell and the Belgian resistance, but they were never able to connect them. The Argentine writer would have cooperated with the latter, and he would have granted asylum in his *petit-hotel* to several dozen wounded soldiers, Belgian fugitives, and German deserters. Owing to his solidarity with Belgium during the dramatic times of the invasion and the occupation, he was decorated as Officer of the Order of Leopold II in 1921, and five years later with the Knight's Cross of the Order of Leopold (*ibid.*, 21). In sum, Payró's personal impressions and experiences of wartime offer a prism through which to examine individual and collective emotions in an extreme situation that called into question all certainties and tested social endurance during the Great War.

## NOTES

1. Roberto J. Payró, 'Diario de un testigo. La guerra vista desde Bruselas', no date, published in *La Nación* (here in after *LN*) on 23/03/1915, in Payró (2009), p. 806.
2. His travel chronicles were gathered in *La Australia Argentina: Excursión periodística a las costas patagónicas, Tierra del Fuego e Islas de los Estados* (1898), and in *En las tierras del Inti* (1909).
3. Shortly after the war, he recalled: 'Me había quedado en Bélgica considerando que ese era el puesto en que podía ser realmente útil a mi diario y a mis convicciones, sin disimularme molestias y posibles peligros, pero sin exagerarme tampoco las unas ni los otros' [I had stayed in Belgium, believ-

- ing that that was the outpost where I could be the most useful to my newspaper and my convictions, without denying discomfort and possible dangers, but without exaggerating one or the other] (Payró, 'La dominación alemana en Bélgica', in Gerchunoff and Bilis (eds.) 1920, unnumbered pages).
4. In 2009, Martha Vanbiesem de Burbridge compiled in a volume the author's articles published in *La Nación* between December 1907 and April 1922, under the title Roberto J. Payró, *Corresponsal de guerra. Cartas, diarios, relatos (1907–1922)*, with a prologue by Roberto Pablo Payró, the writer's grandson.
  5. See de Burbridge 2007; Sánchez 2011; Tato 2013.
  6. See Reddy 2001; Frevert 2011; Plamper 2015.
  7. War culture may be defined as the ensemble of social representations of the war that involve a common imaginary, values, practices and experiences, which give meaning to the war effort, enable adaptation to wartime, and legitimate the use of violence. This concept was coined by Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker in 2000. For a discussion of this, see Offenstadt, Olivera, Picard and Rousseau (2004) and Purseigle (2008).
  8. 'Cartas informativas. Amenazas', dated July 1914 and published in *LN* on 19/08/1914.
  9. 'Cartas informativas. El temor de la guerra', dated October 1912 and published in *LN* on 21/11/1912, in Payró (2009, pp. 272–275).
  10. Payró ordered a shorthand version of Jaurès's speech and reproduced some passages in his report (Payró, 'Diario de un testigo (Desde Bruselas)', dated 29/07/1914 and published in *LN* on 08/09/1914, in Payró 2009, pp. 597–598).
  11. 'Diario de un testigo', dated 30/07/1914 and published in *LN* on 09/09/1914.
  12. On the exodus of refugees to the Belgian cities and the spread of information about German atrocities, see de Schaepdrijver 2006, pp. 77 and 104.
  13. 'Diario de un comunicado', dated 20/08/1914 and published in *LN* on 27/11/1914.
  14. 'Diario de un comunicado', dated 21/08/1914 and published in *LN* on 27/11/1914.
  15. 'Diario de un comunicado', dated 23/08/1914 and published in *LN* on 27/11/1914.
  16. 'La destrucción', dated 23/09/1914 and published in *LN* on 02/04/1915.
  17. 'La destrucción', dated in the third week of November 1914 and published in *LN* on 30/04/1915.
  18. On the social functions of rumours under another occupation, see Knežević (2011).

19. 'Diario de un incomunicado', dated 24/08/1914 and published in *LN* on 28/11/1914.
20. 'La destrucción', dated 28/09/1914 and published in *LN* on 28/03/1915.
21. 'Diario de un incomunicado', no date, published in *LN* on 02/12/1914.
22. 'Diario de un incomunicado', no date, published in *LN* on 02/12/1914.
23. This novel was set during the Franco-Prussian war.
24. Émile Erckmann (1822–1899) and Alexandre Chatrian (1826–1890) were French writers who wrote jointly historical novels from a nationalistic and anti-German stance.
25. 'Diario de un incomunicado', no date, published in *LN* on 01/12/1914.
26. 'La destrucción', dated 13/09/1914 and published in *LN* on 26/03/1915.
27. 'La destrucción', dated 29/09/1914 and published in *LN* on 05/04/1915.
28. 'Diario de un incomunicado', no date, published in *LN* on 02/12/1914.
29. 'Diario de un testigo', dated 10/10/1914 and published in *LN* on 14/04/1915.
30. See also de Schaepdrijver (2014a).
31. 'La destrucción', dated in the first week of November 1914 and published in *LN* on 20/04/1915.
32. 'La destrucción', dated 14/09/1914 and published in *LN* on 27–29/03/1915.
33. 'Diario de un testigo. Peregrinación a las ruinas', no date, published in *LN* on 04/12/1914.
34. 'Diario de un testigo', no date, published in *LN* on 05/12/1914.
35. 'Diario de un testigo', no date, published in *LN* on 04/12/1914.
36. On silence and the challenges of finding adequate language to represent war, see McLoughlin (2011, pp. 135–138).
37. 'Diario de un testigo', no date, published in *LN* on 04/12/1914.
38. 'Diario de un testigo', no date, published in *LN* on 06/12/1914.
39. After the war, Payró wrote of the increasing difficulty in sending his reports to *La Nación*, due to the exorbitant payments demanded by the intermediaries: 'A los honrados portadores que solían encontrarse en un principio y que eran dignos de confianza, pese a los múltiples peligros de su empresa, había sucedido una gavilla de explotadores sin conciencia' [The honest messengers that could be found initially, who were trustworthy, in spite of the multiple dangers of their task, were followed by a gang of unscrupulous exploiters] (Payró 1920, unnumbered pages).
40. 'Diario de un testigo. En Holanda', dated November 1914 and published in *LN* on 28–30/12/1914.
41. 'Diario de un testigo. En Holanda', dated November 1914 and published in *LN* on 28/12/1914.
42. 'La destrucción', dated first week of November and published in *LN* on 19/04/1915.

43. 'La destrucción', dated first week of November and published in *LN* on 19/04/1915 and on 24/03/1915.
44. 'La dominación alemana en Bélgica', in Gerchunoff and Bilis (eds.) 1920, unnumbered pages. Here Payró recalled in detail the experience of his persecution and confinement.
45. 'Diario de un testigo'.
46. 'Los alemanes que reciben la hospitalidad de mi país me habían señalado a las autoridades del suyo para que me castigaran por haber escrito la verdad.' [The Germans who receive the hospitality of my country had denounced me to their own authorities to have me punished for writing the truth.]
47. According to Payró, the Germans seized 'unos cuantos kilogramos de papel manuscrito, noticias y apuntes dactilografiados (...) diversos folletos y libros, ejemplares de diarios franceses e ingleses—que me habían costado más que su peso en oro—números de *La Libre Belgique*, pesadilla de la policía alemana, varias caricaturas (...) el papel de calcar en la máquina usado, mi libro de direcciones' [some kilograms of handwritten paper, news and typewritten notes (...) various brochures and books, copies of French and English newspapers—which had cost me more than their weight in gold—copies of *La Libre Belgique* -nightmare of the German police—several caricatures (...) worn out carbon paper from my typewriter, my address book] (ibid.).
48. On the deportation of workers see de Schaepdrijver (2006, pp. 224–229).
49. 'Cartas informativas, 1919–1922. A guisa de prólogo', dated 09/12/1918 and published 27/02/1919.
50. 'Diario de un testigo', dated 03/08/1914 published in *LN* on 11/09/1914.
51. 'Diario de un testigo (Desde Bruselas)', dated 05/08/1914 and published in *LN* on 25/09/1914, and 'Diario de un comunicado', dated 17/08/1914 and published on 25/11/1914.
52. 'Diario de un comunicado', dated 13/08/1914 and published 20/11/1914; see also de Schaepdrijver, pp. 60 f. and 76.
53. 'Un ciudadano: el burgomaestre Max', dated November 1914 and published in *LN* on 02/02/1915.
54. Ibid., published in *LN* between 29/01/1915 and 02/02/1915.
55. 'Bélgica invadida. La pastoral de monseñor Mercier', dated February 1915 and published in *LN* on 11/03/1915, and 'Bélgica invadida. El cardenal Mercier. Su respuesta al general von Bissing', no date, published on 16/04/1916.
56. 'Monsieur Dagimont. Correo del soldadito belga', no date, published in *LN* on 15–19/07/1915. Since March 1915, an underground organiza-



- tion of the Belgian resistance—*Le Mot du Soldat* (Word from the Soldier)—undertook the task of smuggling correspondence between the Yser front and the occupied territories (see also de Schaepdrijver 2006, p. 117).
57. Heineman was one of the leading figures of the Central Committee of Assistance and Provisioning, which distributed humanitarian aid in occupied Belgium which had been collected by the international Commission for Relief of Belgium, chaired by Herbert Hoover. On these organizations, see Miller (2014), and on the tensions between them, see de Schaepdrijver (2006, pp. 107–114).
58. ‘La destrucción’, dated 09/10/1914 and published in *LN* on 12/04/1915.

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## A Cambro-Belgian in the Great War: Frank Brangwyn as Artist and Activist

*Hugh Dunthorne*

War artists were not an invention of the Great War of 1914–18, though they certainly proliferated then and most of the belligerent powers set up war artist schemes. Within months of the outbreak of hostilities, the German, Austrian and French governments commissioned artists to work at the front (Cork 1994: 139; Lacaille 1998: 6, 11–14); and in 1916 first the Belgian government and then the British did the same, the latter overcoming initial opposition from the War Office which wanted to restrict access to the front at a time of mounting casualty rates (Harries 1983: 3 f., 8–10; Geest and Gryse 1999: 8 f., 16 ff.). In recent years, as centenary commemorations of the conflict have multiplied, the images produced by these artists have come back into the public eye and been reassessed. In Belgium, major exhibitions held in Brussels in 1999 (marking the eightieth anniversary of the conclusion of the war: Geest and Gryse 1999) and in Louvain/Leuven in 2014 (for the centenary of its outbreak: Tollebeek and Asche 2014) provided the opportunity to see the work of painters such as Léon Huygens, Fernand Allard l'Olivier and Achiel van Sassenbrouck, who

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witnessed the consequences of the German invasion of August 1914 at first hand; while in London the Imperial War Museum's centenary display, 'Truth and Memory: British Art of the First World War', included pictures by forgotten women artists like Dorothy Coke and Flora Lion alongside the more familiar work of C.R.W. Nevinson, Eric Kennington and Paul Nash.

Frank Brangwyn, the artist whose wartime activity is discussed in this chapter, is not often mentioned by cultural historians of the First World War, or at best is mentioned only in passing (for example, Malvern 2004: 41, 86; Fox 2015: 72). Yet in the light of recent publications—on Brangwyn himself and on his Belgian contemporaries (Fairclough et al. 2002; Horner 2014a)—there are good reasons for reconsidering his role, and especially for reconsidering it in the context of the present volume. As its sub-title indicates, this book is concerned not just with the fate of Belgium during and immediately after the First World War but also with what lay "beyond Flanders": with the attitudes and actions of neighbouring countries, whether they were hostile like Germany, officially neutral like the Netherlands, or friendly like Britain and France.

As an artist based at first in London and then from the autumn of 1917 in Sussex, Brangwyn's reactions to the conflict add to our understanding of Britain's response to the plight of Belgium and of the many Belgian exiles who found refuge there during the war years. Besides, in the international, cross-border context which this book explores, Brangwyn is a figure of particular interest because of his dual identity. Usually referred to during his lifetime as an English artist, he was in fact of Anglo-Welsh parentage: his mother was Welsh, his father English though of Welsh ancestry. He was born, in 1867, not in England or Wales but in West Flanders, in Brugge/Bruges, where his father practised as a successful architect and craftsman and was instrumental in establishing the Gruuthuse Museum (Marechal 1987: 14 f.). Furthermore, although the family returned to Britain, and to London, when Brangwyn was a boy of eight, he retained throughout his life a personal and emotional connection with the country of his birth (Kremer 2014). From 1906 he repeatedly revisited the towns of West Flanders—Bruges, Nieuport, Furnes and Dixmude (he called them by their French names)—to sketch and make etchings (Brangwyn 1912). So when Germany invaded Belgium in August 1914 and placed it under military occupation, it was natural that Brangwyn should have believed that Britain, as a guarantor of the independence of the young Belgian state, had an obligation to come to its aid, to fight alongside the

Belgian army, and to provide asylum and help for the quarter of a million Belgian subjects who fled to Britain. Aged forty-seven at the outbreak of the war, Brangwyn was too old to enlist himself, but he could, and did, put his considerable artistic energy and skill at the disposal of the Allied war effort. As this chapter will show, he was active during the war years not only in the public sphere, through his posters and other forms of graphic art, but also in a more private capacity, working behind the scenes.

As well as having a dual identity, part British and part Belgian, Brangwyn was also, by the time he was in his twenties, international in another way: as an emerging artist. More than any other British artist of his time, he had an international reputation. In the 1890s and 1900s his work had been exhibited and admired in centres of art across Europe, including those of the Low Countries. He had won diplomas and gold medals at exhibitions in Brussels, Amsterdam and half a dozen other European cities, though not in Britain (Horner 2006: 245–8), and some of his warmest supporters were European writers and art critics. Reviewing an exhibition of more than 200 of Brangwyn's etchings and lithographs at the Galérie Durand-Ruel in Paris in 1912, the poet Emile Verhaeren hailed him as a master in the tradition of Rembrandt, able to find beauty, humanity and drama in the most ordinary of subjects (Verhaeren 1912; cf. Marx 1912: 45).

Brangwyn was further set apart from his British contemporaries in the art world by his reputation for versatility. He had worked successfully in every conceivable form and medium, from ceramics, glass and furniture design to painting and printmaking. He liked to say that an artist 'must be able to turn his hand to everything', adapting his style and technique to whatever he was asked to do (Horner 2006: 1). Moreover he believed that art should be associated with commerce and should serve the business community. From 1899 he had designed posters for commercial firms, and in 1913 one of the most striking of these went on display, commissioned by Frank Pick, the commercial manager of London's Underground Electric Railway Company and a pioneer in the promotion of good design. Appropriately called *The Way of Business*, it advertised Wapping and Rotherhithe stations as access points to the docks, which Brangwyn represented in characteristic style by a lithograph of working seamen and dockers set against a forest of masts, rigging and chimneys (Horner and Naylor 2006: 106 f.).

The poster was effective and was widely admired, so it is not surprising that when, a year later, Pick wanted a recruiting poster to display in London Underground stations, one that was better designed and more



**Fig. 9.1** Frank Brangwyn (1867–1956), *Britain's Call to Arms* (Lithograph, 96.5 × 147.5 cm, 1914. © TfL from the London Transport Museum collection. Recruiting poster commissioned by Frank Pick of the London Underground Electric Railway Company)

arresting than the dull material issued by the official Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, he turned to Brangwyn to supply it. The resulting image, printed over the words *Britain's Call to Arms* (Fig. 9.1), could hardly have been more different from the cheerful pictures of marching soldiers which typified British recruiting placards at the outset of the war (Paret et al. 1992: 16, 53; Cork 1994: 72).

Under a darkening sky a British Tommy, with dead or dying civilians at his feet, stands next to a working man and his young family, against a background of smoking factories on the left and of ruined houses and homeless refugees on the right. The soldier points, but towards what? Towards the shattered buildings and their former occupants, the innocent victims of war? Or to where this poor man's duty lies? Is the soldier's gesture a call to enlist? The observer is left to make up his or her own mind. The British War Office considered the poster much too horrific and demanded that all copies of it be taken down. But Pick stood his ground, and was proved right. Far from discouraging recruitment in London, as the authorities

feared, Brangwyn's design actually boosted it (Walton 1998: 149; Horner 2014b: 20). As the contemporary art journalist Alfred Yockney observed, it stood out on station hoardings not only because of its distinctive style, but because it told a story 'of broken domestic ties, patriotism, heroism, vandalism and tragedy' (Yockney 1915: 286). The allusion to recent events in Belgium was obvious.

The impact made by *Britain's Call to Arms*—'the first great poster of the war', as it was later called (Hardie and Sabin 1920: plate 5)—led to Brangwyn receiving other commissions. Recruiting posters were still needed in Britain until the introduction of conscription in 1916, and then by the United States Navy after America entered the war the following year (Paret et al. 1992: 47; Horner 2014a: 89 f., 98ff., 104). Increasingly, too, there were commissions for posters promoting various war charities, several of them linked to the conflict in Belgium. *Antwerp: the Last Boat* (Fig. 9.2), sponsored by the Belgian Red Cross Fund and issued early in 1915, was perhaps the most powerful of these, recalling the exodus of refugees during the German bombardment of the city in September 1914.

This was, however, only one of a dozen posters which Brangwyn produced in the course of 1915, at a time when he was also designing a set of six charity stamps, commissioned by Associated Newspapers, proprietors of the *Daily Mail* and the *Evening News*, to raise money for the British Red Cross Fund (Horner 2014a: 46–49). In addition, he was collaborating with the author Hugh Stokes on a much larger project. This was for a commemorative book on Belgium 'as it had been', illustrated with more than fifty topographical woodcuts based on Brangwyn's work in the country of his birth over the previous decade (Brangwyn and Stokes 1916).<sup>1</sup> They included at the head of the title page a view of the historic centre of Louvain/Leuven, much of it now destroyed in the German advance. Published early in 1916 and dedicated to Albert, the revered young king of the Belgians, proceeds from the sale of the book went to support the Belgian Relief Fund.

*Belgium* was not a particularly expensive publication: the ordinary clothbound edition sold for half a guinea (ten shillings and sixpence), the equivalent of about £32 today. But the woodcut illustrations were marketed separately too. They were sold in November 1916 at an exhibition mounted in London by the Fine Art Society where they were shown alongside Brangwyn's 'War Lithographs'—twelve of his poster designs plus a series of six 'War Cartoons' commissioned by the *Daily Chronicle*. Available with or without the artist's distinctive typography, the litho-



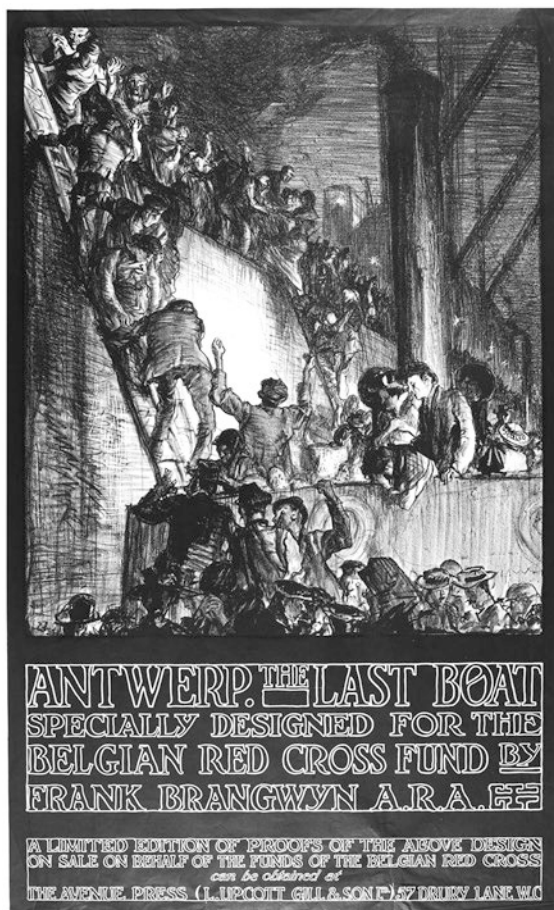


Fig. 9.2 Brangwyn, *Antwerp: the Last Boat* (Lithograph, 100 × 60.8 cm, 1915. © David Brangwyn. Photo courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Charity poster commissioned by the Belgian Red Cross Fund, 1915)

graphs were also sold by the Avenue Press in Drury Lane, the firm which printed them (Brangwyn 1916a, b). What is more, the fact that many were reproduced as cheap postcards or charity stamps increased their sales still further. One print which had sold out altogether by 1916 was *Germans in Belgium*, showing civilians being shot at the foot of a wayside calvary as German forces advanced westwards towards the French frontier (Horner



2014a: 56, 60 f., 71). It was a design reminiscent of Goya's war etchings, made a century earlier, which Brangwyn must surely have known (cf. Goya 1863: plate 15). And like Goya's, Brangwyn's prints demanded attention. According to the Avenue Press, what appealed to people about his images of war was 'the vigour and realism of the work'.

The vigour of Brangwyn's designs and the passion that inspired them is undeniable, and has been recognized often enough (Rodney Brangwyn 1978: 173; Kremer 2014). But were they genuinely realistic? Not in the sense that this was the work of an eyewitness. A few Belgian painters had seen and depicted the impact of the German invasion of their country, as noted above, and so also had an English artist, the lithographer Gerald Spencer Pryse. Employed by the Belgian government as a dispatch rider, Spencer Pryse had witnessed fighting on the Marne and the Aisne and in October 1914 had followed the advance of German forces westwards after the fall of Antwerp. Made on the spot and 'not embellished in any way', his lithographs of these episodes, and particularly of the evacuation of the port of Ostend in mid-October, have a freshness and spontaneity matched by few other war artists (Bradshaw 1917: 3 ff.).<sup>2</sup> As a leading figure in the revival of lithography in Britain, Brangwyn would probably have known Spencer Pryse's work. Moreover, it is clear from his correspondence that he had read press reports of the German invasion and of the barbarity which accompanied it. But he had not seen these events for himself, any more than he had seen the Belgian trenches on the IJzer line, the subject of another of his posters, issued in 1916 to support the charity British Gifts for Belgian Soldiers. Brangwyn never visited the Western Front, although in 1916 and 1917 he talked of doing so (Rodney Brangwyn 1978: 175; cf. Horner 2014a: 17 n. 12), nor was he ever made an official war artist. In part this was because of his age: most of the British official war artists appointed from 1917 onwards were young men in their twenties who had already seen active service in France. Moreover, many of the best known of these painters were products of the Slade School of Art, unlike Brangwyn who, as a self-taught artist without formal training, lacked the connections with the academic and cultural establishment which were necessary to secure a commission from the Department of Information (Malvern 2004: 13 ff.; Horner and Naylor 2006: 183 f.).<sup>3</sup>

It is true that Brangwyn received official assignments of other kinds during the later years of the war. In 1916 he was asked by the Department of Information to contribute pictures of the naval side of the war to a propaganda portfolio of sixty-six lithographs, *Britain's Efforts and Ideals*,

designed to ‘encourage a war-weary public and raise support for the war effort’ (National Museum of Wales 2014; Malvern 2004: 41–44). The following year Brangwyn was engaged by the National War Savings Committee to produce a poster urging people to buy war bonds (Walton 1998: 149–53), and in December 1917 the Canadian War Memorial Fund commissioned him to design a set of six lithographs of sites in Belgium and France where Canadian soldiers had fought. In fulfilling this latter assignment, to be known as *The Ruins of War* (Fig. 9.3), Brangwyn drew on the exceptional photography of William Rider-Rider, formerly of the *Daily Mirror* and from June 1917 official war photographer to the Canadian Army, producing as a result some of the most convincing of all his wartime images (Horner 2014a: 105–114; Brangwyn online).<sup>4</sup>

In the early years of the war photography of this quality hardly existed (Carmichael 1989: 1–44). If, in 1915 and 1916, Brangwyn’s pictures of the war and its impact seemed realistic to his contemporaries—and there is plenty of evidence that they did (for example, ‘Tis’ 1919: 4)—it was



Fig. 9.3 Brangwyn, *Dixmude* (Lithograph, 43.2 × 76 cm, 1918. © David Brangwyn. Amgueddfa Cymru—National Museum Wales, Cardiff. From *The Ruins of War* series, commissioned by the Canadian War Memorials Fund)

because of his refusal to ignore the death and destruction brought about by armed conflict or to idealize the fighting forces involved. Like his civilians, Brangwyn's soldiers and sailors were ordinary men, 'rough-hewn types, who defend the cause of humanity as a matter of course', not the handsome heroes which some critics considered essential to any depiction of the British army and navy (Braun 1916: 90; Horner 2014a: 18, 54; cf. Harries 1983: 44–45). The realism that people saw in Brangwyn's work stemmed from other sources too. It stemmed from his visual memory, since he was depicting places in Belgium like Diksmuide or the quayside at Antwerp, which he knew well. Not least, this realism stemmed from his technique as a printmaker. In the *Antwerp* poster already mentioned, as people clamber aboard the last boat of the day to leave the city, Brangwyn views the scene from below, as if he has already embarked and is among the crowd of fugitives on deck. Moreover, the fact that as an 'auto-lithographer' he worked not with transfer paper but drew directly onto the stone—as Spencer Pryse did too (Bradshaw 1917: 4–5)—enabled Brangwyn to give an impression of immediacy and spontaneity, persuading the viewer that this was a scene sketched rapidly on the spot rather than retrospectively in the artist's studio (Walton 1998: 149).

So far, we have considered Brangwyn as a public figure—responding to commissions from public bodies, many of them war charities, and producing work addressed to a public far wider than the traditional community of art lovers, work which most people would have encountered on street hoardings or the walls of railway stations, 'the poor man's picture gallery'. It was work intended to heighten and sustain public support for the war effort, including, as we have seen, support for Belgian forces at the front and for Belgian refugees in Britain. But alongside his public presence of wartime England, Brangwyn also had a more private role, less visible and addressed not to the public at large but to the émigré community in particular.

In November 1914 Brangwyn wrote to his friend Robert Kitson in Sicily: 'England is getting full of Flemings—many (artists etc.) call on me every day but it is difficult to do anything for them' (Horner 2014a: 42). Difficult, no doubt, but not impossible; and almost immediately Brangwyn was doing what he could for some of the sixty or so refugee artists who came to live in Britain during the war years (Fairclough et al. 2002: 51). In the first place, he helped them find somewhere to live. When Pierre Paulus, painter of the Borinage, the industrial region of the Walloon province of Hainaut, arrived in London around this time he lived initially in Brangwyn's house in Hammersmith. It was probably there that he completed a water-colour



**Fig. 9.4** Pierre Paulus (1881–1959), *La Fuite* (Chalk and watercolour, 25.1 × 35.2 cm, 1914. © DACS 2017. Amgueddfa Cymru—National Museum Wales, Cardiff)

drawing, *La Fuite* (Fig. 9.4), a couple in flight with their infant child and a few bundles of possessions against a background of ruined, smoking buildings, evoking the events of recent months.

This picture quickly became known in Britain. It was reproduced and sold as a postcard to raise money for the Belgian Soldiers Clothes Charity. It was then put on public display as part of the ‘War Relief’ exhibition of *Modern Belgian Art* which travelled from London to Cardiff and Birmingham during the spring of 1915 to raise money for refugee Belgian artists. The leading Welsh collector, Margaret Davies, saw the picture in Cardiff and bought it; and thanks to her later bequest the picture is still in Wales today, in the collection of the National Museum in Cardiff (Fairclough et al. 2002: 32 f., 46, 50 n. 38, 54 f., 168; see also Vincentelli 1981). Margaret Davies’s interest in Paulus’s work is not surprising. Together with her elder sister Gwendoline, she was committed to helping Belgian refugee artists and succeeded in attracting a fair number to settle in Wales during the war years.

Brangwyn also helped émigré artists by giving them the raw materials and equipment that they needed to continue their work. He sent painting

materials to Edgar Gevaert while the painter was recovering from wounds in a military hospital in Wrexham. He gave woodcutting tools to the sculptor George Minne and etching equipment to Jules de Bruycker, whom he also introduced to his favourite printers in London (Fairclough et al. 2002: 33, 65, 179; Horner 2014a: 42). What is more, Brangwyn assisted refugee artists to sell their work by putting them in touch with collectors and by helping to organize public exhibitions (Fairclough et al. 2002: 54, 55, 69, 167, 188). One of these was what would today be called a virtual exhibition, the book *Belgian Art in Exile*, published in 1916 to raise money for the Belgian Red Cross and other charities. ‘A representative gallery of modern Belgian Art’, it reproduced in colour and monochrome the work of sixty-one painters and twenty-three sculptors, some of them exiles in Britain, some serving in the Belgian army, others prisoners of war. The publisher, Bemrose & Sons, undertook to act as ‘intermediary between the artists and any would-be purchaser’.

Besides his efforts to help refugee artists, Brangwyn had one other important contact with the Belgian cultural community in Britain. This was with Emile Verhaeren, ‘the poet of industrial Europe’, as a Welsh newspaper of the time called him, who came to Britain in the autumn and winter of 1914 for a lecture tour of England and Wales, advocating the Belgian cause and pleading for closer ties of friendship between Britain and Belgium (Fairclough et al. 2002: 44 f.). Verhaeren and Brangwyn had been on cordial terms since they met in Paris in 1904, and it was probably around then that they first considered the idea of an illustrated edition of two of Verhaeren’s most admired collections of poems, *Les campagnes hallucinées* and *Les villes tentaculaires*, first published in 1893 and 1895 respectively. Apart from intermittent references in Brangwyn’s correspondence, little is known about the genesis and progress of this project.<sup>5</sup> At first sight the author and his illustrator might seem ill-matched. In the 1890s Verhaeren was known as the francophone poet of the Flemish countryside, the rural heartland where he had been born and which had always inspired him; a poet who saw the industrial town, with its spreading tentacles of roads and railways, as an invasive and contaminating force. Brangwyn, by contrast, was in many ways an urban figure, the artist of industrial labour and commercial activity, of bridges and dockyards and factories, the designer and embellisher of major public buildings and town decorations. Yet Verhaeren’s *Les villes tentaculaires* also contains the germ of a more optimistic view of urbanization—a sense, perhaps stimulated by the poet’s growing familiarity with the graphic art of Brangwyn, that there



is beauty in the industrial environment and that ‘the energies and rhythms’ of the growing town might be ‘a crucible for spiritual transformation and transcendence’ (Stone 2014: 25 f.). When travelling by train through industrial South Wales on his lecture tour in November 1914, Verhaeren was entranced by the sight of foundries and furnaces in Swansea, with their ‘atmosphere of copper-bound fog (...) obscurely lit by the strangled glow of a sun setting far across the bay’. Rushing along the train ‘from window to window, his hands held up in amazement’, he exclaimed *Que c’est beau! Que c’est beau!* (Jones 1957: 51 f.).<sup>6</sup> He was equally delighted by Brangwyn’s etchings for *Les villes tentaculaires*, when the artist showed him proofs, probably during the winter of 1914–15 while Verhaeren was in London (Shaw Sparrow 1919: 226 f.).

Publication of the book was, however, delayed by the war itself, and it did not appear until 1919 (Fig. 9.5), three years after Verhaeren had been killed in a railway accident while on a speaking tour of northern France. As a result, the illustrated edition of *Les villes tentaculaires*, published by the Paris firm of Helleu and Sergent, became a tribute to Verhaeren’s memory—to his memory as a poet, of course, but also as one of the great wartime advocates of the cause of Belgium and its allies, ‘a combatant’, as the poet laureate Robert Bridges put it, ‘who sacrificed his life in the war no less readily and usefully than those who fell in the unequal battle or the irresistible bombardment’ (Royal Society of Literature 1917: 26 f.; Verhaeren 1919).<sup>7</sup>

This chapter has sketched Brangwyn’s contribution to Britain’s war effort—in the public sphere, for which he designed more than sixty posters besides other large-scale works, many of them undertaken without fee, and behind the scenes, through his efforts to help refugee fellow artists. Clearly, he was a man of unusual gifts and unusual energy, especially if we consider that he also continued with his ‘normal’ work during the war years, painting murals for public buildings, designing stained glass windows and mosaics for churches, producing book illustrations, holding public exhibitions of his work at home and abroad. A French art publisher called him *Brangwyn l’unique*—the incomparable Brangwyn—and one can understand why (Brangwyn 1927). And yet the convictions which drove him were no different from those felt by many in Britain during the war years: the belief that Belgium had been wronged and that Britain had a duty to help its ally. Brangwyn’s work may have strengthened and intensified those beliefs by giving them visual expression, but to a large extent he was reflecting convictions that were already widespread in the Britain of



**Fig. 9.5** Woodcut accompanying the poem ‘Les usines’. In Emile Verhaeren, *Les villes tentaculaires*. Paris: Helleu & Sergent, 1919. 4to. 179 + 4 pp., with a lithograph and 49 woodcut illustrations by Brangwyn. (© David Brangwyn. Museum Emile Verhaeren, Sint-Amands, Belgium)

his day. In one sense his war lithographs were a plea for people to do their duty. But in their unvarnished depiction of the destructiveness of war they were also a protest against it, as an affront to human civilization. ‘It is awful,’ he remarked in a letter to Kitson, ‘the cost of life and money and more especially the loss of what has been made by man’ (Walton 1998: 152; Horner 2014a: 54). In this respect too Brangwyn was expressing a conviction, which, by the end of the war, was becoming widespread.

His convictions still strike a chord today. Looking at Brangwyn’s posters of Belgian war refugees—men, women and children—waiting to be evacuated from the banks of the Scheldt in 1915 (Horner 2014a: 68 f.), we cannot help but think of the victims of the refugee crisis in

twenty-first-century Europe. The international circumstances now may be quite different, but the present British government's response to the crisis—its grudging undertaking to 'accept' just 20,000 refugees by the year 2020—seems feeble compared to what this country was willing to do a century ago, when more than ten times that number arrived on British soil. And the slogan that Brangwyn inscribed on one of his refugee posters—'Help is better than sympathy'—seems as relevant now as it ever was.

## NOTES

1. The phrase 'La Belgique telle qu'elle était' recurs in the book's introduction, written by Paul Lambotte, Director-General of Fine Arts in the Belgian Ministry of Arts and Sciences and effectively the voice of Belgian culture in Britain during the war years.
2. *The Fall of Ostend: La Gare Maritime* and *The Fall of Ostend: the Digue during the Embarkation of the Naval Division for Antwerp* are two of a set of nine lithographs by Spencer Pryse, collectively entitled *The Autumn Campaign*, which were issued in a small edition in 1915 and exhibited in London. The quotation is from the artist's own note on the set: <http://www.campbell-fine-art.com/artists.php?id=240>. I am grateful to Christophe Declercq for drawing my attention to Spencer Pryse's work.
3. What Brangwyn thought of the work of Britain's official war artists is unclear. Living in Sussex from late 1917, he probably did not see the exhibitions of paintings by Paul Nash and others held in London in 1918. But he was dismissive of younger English artists in general: writing to his friend R.H. Kitson in Sicily, he remarked that 'not one of them has risen to the great occasion' of the war. To judge from two prints produced by Brangwyn towards the end of the war—a linocut of marching soldiers and a large lithograph of the desolated landscape of the Western Front—only the work of Nevinson and Nash seems to have impressed him more favourably and to have influenced his own work (Horner 2014a: 18, 20, 124, 128).
4. <http://abbottandholder-thelist.co.uk/brangwyn/>, accessed 15 May 2016. For Brangwyn's reliance on photography more generally, see Horner 2006: 193 f.; Horner and Naylor 2006: 44, 119 f., 172; Horner 2014a: 19, 20, 34, 53, 151, 154.
5. I am grateful to Dr. Libby Horner, who from her transcripts of Brangwyn's unpublished correspondence generously provided me with extracts referring to his collaboration with Verhaeren.
6. Mansell Jones, later Professor of French at Bangor, travelled with Verhaeren on his tour, introducing him and translating for him at his lectures.



7. The illustrated edition of *Les campagnes hallucinées* followed in 1927, again published by Helleu and Sergent. Some of Brangwyn's illustrations to this later volume are reproduced in the exhibition catalogue *100 jaar 'Les campagnes hallucinées': Brangwyn, een illustrator voor Verhaeren*, Sint-Amands-aan-de-Schelde: Provinciaal Museum Emile Verhaeren, 1993.

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## The Low Countries as Enemies, 1918–1920

*Hubert P. van Tuyll*

### 1 THE DISTANT ROOTS OF ENMITY

Two small countries, Belgium and the Netherlands, similar in size, with many ties and a shared history, wound up in a vicious diplomatic struggle after the Great War. The participants from both, and the people of one, were utterly convinced of the justice of their cause. The results of the struggle had consequences beyond the Low Countries, as it would affect the Second World War. But despite their similarities, the enmities that came to the surface in 1918 had a long history.

Vladimir Lenin famously said that ‘everything is connected to everything else’. That certainly applies here, because the roots of the crisis lay three and a half centuries earlier. In the sixteenth century the Low Countries existed as a group of fiefdoms under the benevolent rule of the Emperor Charles V—possibly the most powerful ruler ever to speak Dutch. There were medieval boundary lines reflecting the modern division, but these were not national boundaries in any sense of the term. After his abdication in 1555, however, the Low Countries were governed through his son Philip II, whose rigid approach triggered the Dutch revolt, which started in the late 1560s. The largely Protestant northern half of the Low Countries

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opposed the Roman Catholic ruler King II of Spain. After eight decades of struggle, the Treaty of Münster (1648) left Spain with only the southern Netherlands. Many Protestants there had fled north to avoid persecution. The geographical line between north and south became a border that would exist more or less in the same way for the next few centuries, and the separate histories of the Low Countries began. Although it should be noted that Henri Pirenne argued that the separate cultural history of the southern Netherlands began much earlier (Pirenne, 1900–1932).

The devil lay in the details. On both the eastern and western sides of the boundary, there were problems: the port of Antwerp only had sea access via Dutch waters because, since 1604, both banks of the Schelde River had been in Dutch hands. The Schelde was closed, destroying the Antwerp economy. The owners of the southern Netherlands (in turn, Spain and Austria) did raise the issue; in 1784 the Holy Emperor Joseph II even threatened war. In the east the Dutch controlled the strategically important city of Maastricht—a footnote to history that would become a major point of contention in 1918–1919.

The issue became temporarily moot when Charles Pichegru's French Revolutionary cavalry overran the Low Countries in 1795 (the only time that a cavalry force captured a fleet). After Napoleon's defeat, the Great Powers at Vienna decided to create a United Kingdom of the Netherlands combining everything, including Luxembourg, under the Orange family. France was seen as a danger and the Congress wanted to hem France in. (Considering that while this was going on Napoleon returned, invaded the Low Countries, and was only barely defeated at Waterloo, you can understand their perspective.)

The future of Maastricht was not a simple matter. Its governance before the Napoleonic conquest had been complex. King William I of the Netherlands recognized that his ownership of the city was unsure. As Napoleon's strength ebbed, the Prussians sent commissioners there, with some view to claiming it (the legalities were murky.) William sent his own commissioners, who asked him to send troops commanded by 'an intelligent general'. William sent the troops, and he did get Maastricht. He now governed a substantial kingdom, and Antwerp was now open again (Gooch and Masterman 1971: 7 f.; Marsiljé 1984: 1–8).<sup>1</sup>

## 2 BELGIAN INDEPENDENCE AND AFTERMATH

In 1830, revolution broke out in Brussels. William I did not yield voluntarily. He attacked in 1831, and for 10 days was winning—until the French arrived. William withdrew but refused to accept the outcome. Finally in

1839, the Dutch, Belgians, and the Great Powers signed a series of agreements known as the Treaty of London. This had three relevant consequences:

1. Belgium was recognized.
2. It was required to be neutral, and that neutrality was by implication guaranteed by the Great Powers.
3. Belgium lost some of the territory it had acquired—the Maastricht appendix, and part of Luxembourg, which became independent but remained under the Dutch monarchy. (Forbes Wels 1963: 117; Marsiljé 1984: 6–8; Landes 1999: 247)

The settlement cost Belgium the territories it had claimed in 1830 and left the Schelde in Dutch hands. Later, Leopold II considered invading the land along the south bank, Zeeuws-Vlaanderen. He rejected the idea, and as the twentieth century dawned, the Schelde unexpectedly acquired great military significance. The growing threat of Germany made Antwerp a path for British intervention in case of invasion. In 1910 the Netherlands announced plans to build a new fort on the Schelde, leading to an international outcry—it even reached the United States—as it was assumed that it was designed to convince the Germans that the Dutch would oppose a British entry. Whether the Dutch *could* legally do that was not clear.<sup>2</sup>

### 3 THE GREAT WAR

In the last decade before the war, the relationship remained *wijnig hartelijk* [barely congenial]. Some Belgians, led by the journalist Eugene Baie, did seek closer relations, but the Dutch were unenthusiastic, perhaps explaining why Baie later joined the annexationists (de Beaufort 1928, II/4: 89–91; Hampe 1918: 32; Barnouw 1923: 105; Smit 1971, vol. I 114).<sup>3</sup> The Great War exacerbated the divide. The Netherlands, which incidentally was the first western European nation to mobilize, did contact Belgium in late July about acting jointly. Before the Belgians could respond, the Dutch broke off the talks when they received assurances directly from Helmuth von Moltke, the German commander. The Netherlands was spared.

Belgium was not. The country was subjected to a barbaric invasion, the execution of 5,000 civilians, and the flight of between 700,000 and one million civilians to the Netherlands, a hundred thousand of whom remained there. (Later, many Dutchmen felt embittered about

annexationism because they had expected gratitude.) Belgium would be under the German jackboot for more than four years. The Netherlands avoided the war, if only through intensive diplomacy and military signaling of its willingness to resist. Anti-Dutch feelings in Belgium grew because some felt that the Dutch were benefitting from the war (de Waele 1996: 194).

#### 4 THE WORLD VIEWS OF THE LOW COUNTRIES

In this the Belgians were not alone. The Netherlands suffered a steady decline in its image during the war. This was inevitable. The twentieth century was not kind to neutrality (Van Ditzhuyzen et al. 1998; Snijders 1923: 538, 545; De Leeuw 1939: 150, 167–68).<sup>4</sup> Global total wars changed neutrality from respected to immoral. If the basic values of civilization were at stake, what right did a country have not to choose sides? This attitude, associated with the Second World War, actually became dominant during the first. By 1918 both alliances had lost patience with the Netherlands. German commander Erich Ludendorff was seriously considering invasion. The Entente was not—but its opinion of the country had steadily deteriorated.

At the beginning of the war, frictions were minor. In 1914 British Foreign Secretary Edward Grey had menaced the Dutch envoy with a comment of ‘you are either for us or against us’, but that turned out to be a transitory attitude. Winston Churchill advocated sending the army up the Schelde, but that got nowhere because his own army opposed the idea. By the same token, the German military and government were perfectly happy with Dutch neutrality, so long as it was defended. Their main issue was that Dutch territory might be used by the Entente as a base for attacking the German rear (more or less what Churchill was proposing). The length of the war was what caused the problem. Germany sought to use the Netherlands as a “windpipe” to gain imports, and the British attempted to prevent that. The problem was that the Netherlands was dependent on trade with both Germany and Britain, and could not cut off trade with either (Snijders 1923: 538, 545; De Leeuw 1939: 150, 167–68).<sup>5</sup>

The Dutch room to manoeuvre became narrower, and finally almost disappeared, due to three events: the declaration of unrestricted submarine warfare, the American declaration of war, and the seizure of most of the Dutch merchant fleet by Britain and America. Unrestricted submarine warfare meant that any ship trading with a belligerent nation was now a

belligerent vessel, and this crippled Dutch overseas trade. The American belligerence meant that no Great Powers remained neutral. Until 1917 the Dutch could count on diplomatic support of its neutrality arguments from the western giant—but after that no longer. Woodrow Wilson, so long a principled defender of the rights of neutrals, now discovered more important principles (Greven 1928: 150; Reginbogin 2009: 25).<sup>6</sup>

The seizure of the Dutch merchant fleet put the Dutch government in a legally impossible position. The Germans demanded that the Dutch treat the seizure as a *casus belli*. The Entente saw the seizure as fully legal and neither Anglo-Saxon government was in a mood to hear a protest. But if the Dutch did nothing, the Germans might treat its inaction as accepting the seizure—and therefore a *casus belli*. The Dutch compromised on a vigorous protest, which still angered the Entente at Versailles, but it was not enough for the Germans at the time (Treub 1931: 367–68; Turlington 1976: 97; Kruizinga 2012: 320). Ludendorff demanded use of Dutch railways for transport, including the shipment of sand and gravel into Belgium; the Germans claimed it was not for military purposes, but this was untrue. This would later be used against the Dutch, although the British had actually counselled flexibility because there were really no British troops available to assist in case of invasion (Porter 1980: 207; Frey 1998: 85 f.).<sup>7</sup>

Belgium hoped to parlay its own status and Dutch woes into a post-war success. In 1914, “Brave Little Belgium” stoutly resisted the invasion, launched significant offensives from Antwerp, and fought on along the Yser river for the entire war (*Telegraaf*, 24.3.1935). However, the country’s image deteriorated. Belgium (like the USA) was never an Entente member (to retain its neutrality). At Versailles this would cause problems. Belgium had twice negotiated with Germany. It had the legal right to do so, but still. It led the Entente to issue the Declaration of Sainte-Adresse in 1916 promising to fight for the full restoration of Belgium and obtaining compensation, but France—ominously—blocked a proposed reference to Belgium’s “just claims” regarding borders. Also, it did not help that the Belgian King Albert refused to let his small army be drawn into Allied offensives.

## 5 THE CONTINUING DUTCH DECLINE

Even so, on the eve of the Versailles conference, the image of the Netherlands was worsening, for two reasons. The first was the Kaiser’s flight. There is tantalizing—but very limited—evidence that Wilhelm’s insistence in

1917 and 1918 on leaving the Netherlands alone was related to occasional realizations that he might have to flee there. Law and tradition forbade his expulsion. Substantively this mattered little, as the Entente never really pressed the Netherlands for his release. Even King Albert opposed putting Wilhelm on trial. But his presence made the Dutch look pro-German or even quasi-German, particularly among the French.<sup>8</sup> David Lloyd George had campaigned on the slogan “Damn the Junkers, Hang the Kaiser”—and even if that was just rhetoric it did keep the spotlight on the fact that the Dutch were protecting the evil Kaiser. Even if the conference’s demand for Wilhelm was pro forma, it created diplomatic complications, reminded the world that Wilhelm was living in some comfort in the Netherlands, and caused the Dutch to be on edge lest he escape back to Germany (Townley 1922: 282–289; Frey 1998: 333–335).<sup>9</sup>

More serious was the permission the Dutch granted more than 70,000 German soldiers to withdraw through Limburg. This passage occurred after the armistice and while the Dutch government was coping with the threat of socialist revolution. Faced with severe Entente condemnations, the new Dutch foreign minister, Herman Adriaan van Karnebeek, blundered by claiming that he had done this after reaching an understanding with the Allied envoys in The Hague. This was not true. He had put this claim in a message to his Paris envoy and may not have realized that that gentleman would publish it in response to French complaints. Exactly why van Karnebeek attempted to mislead his own envoy is not clear. Certainly he lacked the skills of his predecessor, John Loudon. He had advised his government that the permission was not a violation of neutrality law because of the Armistice—a peculiar error for the highly legalistic minister. However, he was severely troubled by the threat of revolution and may have been looking for a way to give his government a way out, especially as the cabinet was uncertain about the army’s loyalty. Clearly, he had not anticipated the depth of Entente anger over the matter. Worse, there were rumours that the Germans had taken weapons and their Belgian booty. This was not true, but Allied anger allowed the Belgians to again question whether the Dutch could defend Limburg. If not, the argument went, Belgium’s strategic position was untenable. The implication was that peace in Europe in case of future German aggression would be better served by Belgian possession of the territory (Smit 1950: 334 f.; Heldring 1970: 267n; Calmes 1976: 336).<sup>10</sup>



## 6 BELGIAN HOPES AT VERSAILLES

The Belgian claims at Versailles were based on a two-part legal argument: the invasion of 1914 had effectively nullified the 1839 treaties, and all aspects of the treaties constituted a single whole. As the treaties had guaranteed and indeed mandated neutrality, and that guarantee had failed, that meant that all aspects, including Belgium's borders, could be revised. There was a highly practical reason why the treaties had to be considered as a whole. Four of the five treaties had been signed by the Great Powers. If the whole treaty arrangement were to be renegotiated, that would mean that the Great Powers would be at the table. Obviously the violator of Belgian neutrality, Germany, could not participate. The Austrian Empire was destroyed and communist Russia was isolated. The only remaining Great Powers that would be at the table were Entente stalwarts Britain and France. Their presence was essential because if the borders were to be revised, that could only be accomplished with strong Great Power support. If Belgium had to approach the Netherlands alone and demand for territory, the answer would be quick and rude (Miller 1951: 17).<sup>11</sup>

There was another reason why the treaties had to be treated as a whole. Article VI of the Belgian–Dutch treaty of 1839 specified that the parties “forever” renounced any and all territorial claims. The Belgians’ argument was that the borders had been drawn taking mandatory neutrality into account; in other words, the country did not need military defensible frontiers. With mandatory neutrality obviously a failure, the needs of the country were different and the borders ought to be revised.

There were actually three territories Belgium desired. The first was Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, the strip of Netherlands territory on the south bank of the Schelde River. This 340-square mile postage stamp mattered, because it controlled Antwerp's access to the sea. While the 1839 agreements had permanently opened its commercial sea access, in wartime it could be closed by the Dutch. The Belgians were more interested in the river than the land. Complete sovereignty over the Schelde would also have been satisfactory. Belgians believed that in that case Zeelandic Flanders would sooner or later fall to them anyway and the Dutch agreed (Miller 1951: 77).<sup>12</sup>

Second, there was southern Dutch Limburg. This territory with the city of Maastricht had been occupied by Belgium during the war of independence and only lost permanently in 1839. For this reason, Belgian documents always referred to a ‘ceded’ Limburg. Therefore, it could be argued that adjusting the boundary would return to Belgium land that

had originally belonged to it, and more importantly, that was militarily necessary to its defence. So long as it was in Dutch hands, the Belgian army could not defend the Meuse river line.

Finally, the Belgians hoped to (re)gain all of Luxembourg, although this was no longer an issue *vis-à-vis* the Dutch. In 1839 the Grand Duchy had been divided between Belgium and the Kings of the Netherlands, who remained its heads of state until 1890. The death of William III without surviving male issue caused the Grand Duchy to be ruled thereafter by another branch of the Nassau family, but it did not eliminate continuing Franco-German quarrels about the little country's future. Belgium's interest in Luxembourg was quite natural—but so was France's, and this would cause trouble.

## 7 COMPLICATIONS

Belgium's ambitions at the expense of either of the other Low Countries undermined its claims on the other. No gains from the Netherlands could be made without French support, but that could only come if Belgium accepted French domination of Luxembourg (Hymans 1958: 287; Calmes 1976: 5 f.). Domination of Luxembourg was only possible by aligning with the other Great Powers and abandoning France. Yet some type of collective Allied support was necessary to force the Dutch to the table. No success had been obtained during the war in getting solid promises of support. Doing so was complicated by Belgium's legal position during the war as an associated, but not Allied, power. This allowed it to retain neutrality as a legal fiction and gave it some diplomatic freedom of movement, but this flexibility came at a price. Nor did the Allies have a single view on the post-war settlement. The American entry into the war was welcome but ultimately came at a diplomatic price. Carving up countries for military and political reasons, without regard to local feelings, sounded much like the Congress of Vienna, which Woodrow Wilson regarded as anathema (Hymans 1958: 277 f., 283–286, 288–290).<sup>13</sup>

However, the biggest problem was Belgium's eternal curse: it was internally divided. The government's policy was not set in stone. The foreign minister in 1916–1917, Baron Eugène Beyens, was opposed to annexationism. Popular and political support for annexation was unclear. The Belgian Socialists were opposed, as was the powerful Cardinal Désiré Mercier (he did not want more Dutch speakers). Many Flemings were opposed. The cabinet was supportive but with varying degrees of enthusiasm. So the

annexation effort would require domestic politics—and clever diplomacy (Marchal 1931: 32, 47, 75–78; Hymans 1958: 240 f.; Devleeshouwer 1968: 220 f.).<sup>14</sup>

The latter was easier said than done. The foreign ministry had less experience in Great Power politics than its northern neighbour counterpart. In 1916–1917 it had somewhat unusually been headed by a professional, but he suffered the fate of many professional diplomats when his advice ran foul of the prevailing political winds. The ministry returned to political hands. After a short interlude under Prime Minister Charles de Broqueville, the ministry came to Paul Hymans in January 1918 (Beyens 1981: 18, 79 f., 86 f., 98–100, 189; Marsiljé 1984: 16 f.).

Despite his Dutch heritage (his grandfather came from Dordrecht, south of Rotterdam), Hymans was francophone and barely spoke Flemish (Basse 1930–33: 174). A brilliant lawyer and law professor, he was leader of the Liberal Party. Despite having represented Belgium in London during the war, he was not a professional diplomat. That would not have mattered except that his delegation was, in the best Belgian tradition, organized to reflect the national political balance. Emile Vandervelde was the leader of the Socialists and chose to go to Versailles himself, while Jules van den Heuvel represented the Catholic Party. Van den Heuvel was not in a position to give Hymans much support on the annexation issue because his time was entirely taken with financial matters. Vandervelde's behaviour toward his chief can most politely be described as “ambiguous”. Whether he supported annexations depended entirely on to whom he was speaking, and when.

Hymans had some competent support. Pierre Orts, the ministry Secretary-General, and minister of state Paul Segers, proved themselves highly able to analyse the issues, but neither they nor their ministry were well prepared to analyse the positions and motivations of other countries. Author and politician Pierre Nothomb organized the mostly clandestine effort to build support in the targeted provinces and also ran the ultranationalist *Comité de Politique Nationale*. But he also could not be involved in the actual diplomacy, so it was ultimately up to Hymans.

Not all Belgium's problems were of Hymans's making but his tactlessness became legendary. His real passion led him to annoy almost every major leader. Once during a debate over reparations he told Lloyd George that Britain had become the richest country in Europe—something he should not have said. By the end of the conference the British had stopped listening to him and Georges Clemenceau once suggested that he should drown himself. Even the initially sympathetic Americans became alienated.

But that all came later (Marchal 1931: 19; Hymans 1958: 434 f.; Mee 1980: 197 f.; Marks 1981: 94 f., 110 f.).

## 8 OPENING SALVOS

Hymans was forced at the outset to focus on an important symbolic issue: the size of the delegation. Under the original plan, he had been awarded two delegates, just like every other smaller power—and fewer than Brazil! Hymans passionately, and I think correctly, argued that Belgium was not just another small country, and he got his third seat—but not without cost. He had justly chastised the Greats, but the Greats did not like it (Hymans 1958: 31, 315–323; de Waele 1989: 73 f., 1551 f.).

Then he had to make his core representations. Here he faced a conundrum. He did not want to be explicit about the territorial demands, preferring that the border adjustments he wanted would come from the Great Powers. In other words, he had to ask for what he wanted, without being explicit about what he wanted. Up to a point he was successful, as there was little question during the conference about what he really wanted. Yet he had no advance arrangements with any Entente government, which would have been difficult to arrange given his non-membership in the Entente. He had to rely heavily on his closest personal ally, the future French Prime Minister André Tardieu. Tardieu was no small fish. A future prime minister, he was Clemenceau's closest confidant and met with *le Tigre* every day. Tardieu was completely behind Belgium and would chair the commission tasked with studying the 1839 treaties. And that commission was given very broad terms of reference by the Great Powers. Hymans had reason to feel confident (Tardieu 1921: 243; Zaaijer 1933: 24 f.).<sup>15</sup>

His confidence may explain one of the oddest *lacunae* in the Belgian strategy. The Belgian delegation eventually became aware that there were an unusually large number of senior Dutch diplomats floating around Paris. There is no evidence that the Belgians ever paid any serious attention to their presence. Research has not yielded a precise explanation for this yet. The memoranda and correspondence suggests that there was an assumption that the Netherlands would never be able to influence the Entente governments.

Paradoxically, this assumption exactly reflected the Dutch worries in 1918–1919. The Dutch did not underestimate the threat. Even during the war many officials had seen it coming. Therefore, a multilevel counter campaign was organized. Massive petition drives were launched in the threatened lands, the inhabitants being asked to express their desire to

remain Dutch. Priests in overwhelmingly Catholic Limburg declared from the pulpit that it was the duty of all good Catholics to sign the petitions, and it was beneficial to the Netherlands to have its first Catholic government since the Duke of Alva. The Dutch government took a sudden interest in Zeelandic Flanders, historically a rather neglected spot. The Queen made official visits. This was all based on the idea that, given the Wilsonian influence, land was not likely to be transferred against the desire of the inhabitants (Marks 1981: 138; Marsiljé 1984: 27; Middelkoop 2010: 199 f.; de Waele 1989).<sup>16</sup>

But it would have been naive to do this and then assume that the Great Powers at Versailles would reach the “correct” decision. The Dutch did not. Van Karnebeek recruited a number of diplomats to go to Paris, including the last two foreign ministers, Loudon, and Reneke de Marees van Swinderen, who held the legation in London. Swinderen had excellent contacts with the British and the Americans; Loudon was even better connected with Washington, where he had recently served, and also with the French.

Public opinion was addressed by paying newspapers to place pro-Dutch articles, the only way to get past the Quay d’Orsay’s anti-Dutch PR machine. The French were also offered aid and low interest loans for reconstruction—with the *caveat* that this would not happen if France supported annexationism. Things did not always go smoothly: one Dutch diplomat managed to alienate a number of Frenchmen, partly by making an (unintentional) threat of war at a dinner, and the aid packages were delayed by bureaucratic problems. But as it later turned out, the diplomatic approaches bore fruit (Marsiljé 1984: 26; de Waele 1989: 839; Middelkoop 2010: 202).<sup>17</sup>

However, van Karnebeek was faced with a problem; should he personally go to Versailles to give the official, public Dutch response? The conference demanded Dutch participation. His diplomats were divided and he was, perhaps, chastened by his early stumbles, less sure of himself than he usually was. In the end he did go, carefully explaining that he was there to give “information” as he did not want to admit that the conference had jurisdiction over the Netherlands. At one of the last meetings where he spoke, his presence proved wise in terms of protocol. The ardently pro-Belgian Tardieu was going to preside, but because van Karnebeek was a minister, the French foreign minister, the much-abused Stephen Pichon, had to take the chair. Pichon could not have cared less about Belgium and its positions. Van Karnebeek was greatly praised, even credited later for the outcome. That was inaccurate, because by the time that he spoke, the once promising Belgian position had already collapsed.

## 9 RESOLUTION

To say that Hymans experienced disappointment is an understatement. In March of 1919, the Commission on Belgian Affairs' report gave him an almost complete victory. The treaties were declared to be a single whole, the border issues were acknowledged, and the Great Powers and the Low Countries were to participate in the treaty revisions. Hymans correctly concluded that it could not have been better. Even better, or so it seemed: the Great Power leaders voted to accept the report. Victory seemed imminent (Tardieu 1921: 244 f.; Fenaux 1946: 202 f.; Miller 1951: 74; Hymans 1958: 369, 372–78; Headlam-Morley 1972: 45 f.; de Waele 1989: 765).<sup>18</sup>

Hymans's complacency was soon shattered. The adoption of the report, while signalling victory, in fact did not mean that at all. The Great Power leaders and their representatives had adopted the report, as it later turned out, without reading it. In early April it became clear that the Allies were setting the Belgian issues aside. Germany's western boundary was set—critical, because Tardieu based his pro-annexationism on the idea that the Netherlands would be compensated with German territory. Without that exchange, the possibility of a major border change melted away. There is language in the Treaty of Versailles that shows it never completely vanished, but Hymans managed to lose the only chance he had for a victory on any of the border issues. The British and French publicly endorsed giving Belgium unlimited access via the Schelde, but Hymans failed to take advantage of the opportunity and hence came away empty-handed (Link 1989; Hymans 1958, 425–29, 433–39; Marks 1981: 262 f.).<sup>19</sup>

By the time the public speeches were given by the two foreign ministers in May and June, the chances of Belgian success were small. Nevertheless, Hymans was still shattered when, on 4th June, the Great Powers announced their decision, which did create a commission to negotiate a new treaty, but with a critical stipulation:

n'impliquant ni transfert de souveraineté territoriale, ni création de servitudes internationale [implying no transfers of territorial sovereignty, nor creation of international servitudes] (Hymans 1958: 486f.)

This blocked everything Hymans wanted. The language had come from U.S. Secretary of State Robert Lansing, who ironically had begun as a Belgian sympathizer. He had been much moved by the suffering of the Belgian people during the war and that was one reason why he supported the American entry into World War I. Lansing had been excluded from most of the important decision-making at Versailles by the increasingly

paranoid Wilson, but that is exactly why he had such a huge impact on the resolution of the Belgian situation, because it was not a major issue for the President. The commission would meet in 1919–1920 but the negotiations collapsed; historians still argue over whose fault that was. A Schelde treaty was negotiated in 1925 but sank in the Dutch upper house. The border had remained exactly where it was (Hellema et al. 1999; Rolin-Jaequemyns 1927: 1; Miller 1951: 105; Schuurisma 1999: 95 f.).

## 10 SOME FINAL QUESTIONS

Many questions remain.<sup>20</sup> The speed with which Belgium's position and image deteriorated in 1918–1919 is remarkable and there is room for further study as to whether it was the result of recent events or had been developing since 1914. Certainly, the rapidity with which the Entente countries abandoned a nation whose invasion gave them the moral high ground is remarkable. The unfavourable outcome has been attributed to inherent factors in the situation: Belgian problems, or Dutch skill; while I tend to favour the latter, the debate will continue. The same can be said about the issue of whether Belgium could have done better. A more important issue is whether the poor post-1918 situation crippled chances for cooperation in the face of the Nazi threat. Finally, why Hymans, unquestionably a talented man, blundered so ferociously at Versailles, is difficult to explain. Did his passion keep him from accurately perceiving the diplomatic realities? Was it because he treated the conference as a legal event (he was, after all, a lawyer)? Was it inexperience? Or had he taken on the task in order to advance his own political career, and hence postured at Versailles mainly for his domestic audience? There are pros and cons associated with each of these explanations. A modern biography of the man, which he richly deserves, is needed.

## NOTES

1. See also Miller (1951: 15–17) and Terlinden (1930: 295–96, 379).
2. De Marees van Swinderen to van der Staal van Piershil, 23.1.1911, in Smit (1971–73, vol. I, pp. 663–65, #527); Müller to Bethmann-Hollweg, 4.2.1911, “Stukken betreffende Nederland, Buitenlandse Zaken”; van der Staal van Piershil to de Marees van Swinderen, 14., 18. and 25.2.1911; de Marees van Swinderen to van der Staal van Piershil, 23.1.1911, “Buitenlandse Zaken”; Heemskerk to Calvello, quoted in de Leeuw (1939: 136 f.); Karl Renner report, 11.7.1912, in Smit (1968: 160, #111).

3. See also van Tets van Goudriaan to R. Melvil van Lynden, 15.1.1904, ARA-II, Buitenlandse Zaken— Kabinet en Protocol, nr. Toegang 2.05.18, inv nos. 50, 231.
4. For contemporary Dutch views, see Chadwick (2002: 14).
5. See also de Marees van Swinderen to Loudon, 7.8.1914, in Smit (1962: 24–26, #44); de Marees van Swinderen to Loudon and reply, 7.8.1914, ARA-II, “Buitenlandse Zaken – Kabinet en Protocol”; also Porter (1980: 117).
6. See also Nigel et al. (2001: 80, n37); House and Seymour (eds) (1921, II: 446).
7. See also telegrams dated 25. 4.1918 and 9., 10., and 15.6.1918, “Duitse Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken – Stukken betreffende Nederland”.
8. In 1998, the former Minister for European Affairs Alain Lamassoure said, “seen from Paris, a Dutchman is a German”.
9. See also ARA-II ‘Buitenlandse Zaken – Archief van het gezantschap Groot-Brittannië (London)’, 1913–1937 inv nr 82.
10. Council of Ministers minutes, 3.10.1914, in Smit (1962: 145–59, #171); German legation to foreign ministry, 9. and 11.11.1918, ministry memo, 12.11.1918, van Karnebeek, aide-mémoire, 23.11.1918, in Smit (1962: 728, 730–31, 737, 752–54, ## 724, 730, 738, 762); German legation to Foreign Ministry, 13.11.1918, ARA-II, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken. A-Dossiers 1919–1940; Fallon to van Karnebeek, 1. and 21.12.1918, ARA-II, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken. Archief van het gezantschap Groot-Brittannië (London), 1913–1937. Nr toegang 2.05.44; Gevers to van Karnebeek, 23.10.1918, ministry to German legation, 14.11.1918, in Smit (1962: 739, ## 674, 742); van Karnebeek to de Stuers, 21, and 26.11.1918, and van Karnebeek diary, 22, and 26.11.1918, in Smit (1962: 749–50, 760–61, ##756, 758, 771–72); Fallon to Hymans, 23.11.1918, Limbourg DB37 folio “Passages de Troupes Allemandes par le Limbourg”, Dossier Délégation Belge Versailles, Belgian Foreign Ministry Archives.
11. Conversation with Eyre Crowe, recorded in Werkarchief Minister van Buitenlandse Zaken, 1918–1927. Nr toegang 2.05.26, inv nr 26, ARA-II; Report of the Commission on Belgian Affairs, ARA. Collectie Van Eysinga. Nr toegang 2.21.060, inv nr 177.
12. See de Stuers to van Karnebeek, 12.2.1919, in Smit (1964: 927–929, #921); see also Colenbrander (1927: 2, 7, 54–57).
13. See van Vollenhoven to van Karnebeek, 12.12.1918, Archief van het Gezantschap te België en Luxemburg.
14. Letter from Flemish Committee to Col. House, 17.4.1919, DB30/III, Dossier Délégation Belge a Versailles; #1121/1122 Affaire Frans van



- Cauwelaert, *Papiers Carton de Wiart*, Algemeen Rijksarchief (Belgium); see also Boudens (1975: 204 f.); Basse (1930–33: 136); Witte and Craeybeckx (1983: 190, 192); Boileau (1996: 32); de Schaepdrijver (1999: 195 and 202); Marks (1981: 82).
15. Pierre Orts, “Souvenirs de ma carrière”, Archief Orts, General State Archives, 122; van Vollenhoven to van Karnebeek, 21.1.1919, in Smit (1962: 89 f., #892).
  16. 380 Legation Rome to Foreign Ministry, 28.2.1919, Letter to Belgian Consulate, April 1919, Note to Foreign Ministry, 24.4.1919, Nothomb to Belgian delegation, 14.8.1919, DB30/II and DB 37 2 and 3, Dossier Délégation Belge à Versailles.
  17. Van Karnebeek to Loudon 22 Nov 1918, Archief Loudon ARA; Reports in Belgisch Gezantschap, inv nr 962, ARA; Rochussen to van Karnebeek, 9.2.1919, in Smit (1962: 924–27, #916).
  18. Van Karnebeek to de Stuers, 1.3.1919, Archief van het gezantschap Groot-Brittannie (London), 1913–1937, inv nr 823, ARA; reply, 2.3.1919, Archief van het gezantschap te Frankrijk, inv nr 933, ARA; Commission on Belgian Affairs, 6.3.1919, in Bourne and Cameron Watt (eds.) (1989: 129–33, #43); Commission report, Collectie Van Eysinga, Nr toegang 2.21.060, inv nr 177, ARA: de Stuers to van Karnebeek, 8.3.1919, in Smit (1962: 986–90, #985).
  19. Gaiffier to Hymans, 29.3.1919, Dossier Délégation Belge à Versailles, DB30/II; Mantoux’s Notes, Link, Arthur S., ed. *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 56 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 592–93.
  20. These questions will be addressed in my forthcoming book, *Small Countries in a Big Power World: The Belgian-Dutch Conflict at Versailles, 1919*.

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## Westfront Nieuwpoort: The (Collected) Memory of the Belgian Front

*Karen Shelby*

Leading up to the 2014 centenary of the outbreak of the Great War, tourist organizations in the local municipalities of Belgium began expressing interest in creating new museums to address specific World War I narratives, as well as overhauling the content of already established museums. As Raymond Silverman notes, the museum has become a strategic space for negotiating ownership of and access to knowledge produced in a local setting (Silverman 2015). In these years of the centenary, exactly which town or village “owns” a specific memory, which at 100 years after the Armistice is typically only the fragmentary collected memories of the war, has become an issue for museums, often requiring negotiation between the towns, museums, and tourist boards in the region over the planning and organization of the content of exhibitions. This chapter describes the neglected and recovered story of the inundation of the IJzer plain. The flooding, a crucial event in the opening months of the Great War, took place on the North Sea coast, 40 km north of the more famous Ieper (Ypres) Salient, and was largely overlooked from the mid-twentieth century

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until the eve of the centenary. Examining tourist destinations, consumer culture, and institutionalized histories, this chapter charts a narrative of how the flooding has re-entered both popular culture and academic histories of the war.

With the opening in 2014 of the Westfront Nieuwpoort Visitor's Centre, a small museum adjacent to the sluice gates of the IJzer River in the city, the city of Nieuwpoort claimed recognition during the centenary. In the museum, and in the town at large, the inundation and the story of Nieuwpoort was reacknowledged in contemporary popular and academic culture as a pivotal moment. It was at Nieuwpoort that German advancement into France was halted, which, as a result, served to establish the trench warfare that came to characterize the Western Front. The inundation is no longer a footnote in the master narratives of the 'In Flanders Fields Museum' in Ieper or even in the Royal Army Museum in Brussels.<sup>1</sup> The story took a prominent position in the 2014 Belgian centenary commemorations. The museum engages visitors in the site-specificity of Nieuwpoort's history on October 29th 2014 through its unique location and an exhibition strategy that envelops the viewer in a narrative of the war and the sluice complex of the Ganzepoot.

## 1 OCTOBER 2014

In the autumn of 1914, Belgium's army was small, ill-equipped, and unprepared to defeat the invading Germans. But due to the stubborn resistance of the fortresses of Liege and Namur it was able to slow the invasion and allow for the timely arrival of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), which helped prevent the capture of Paris. The Germans were first stopped by the French at the river Marne and by the English at the river Aisne. As a consequence the Germans changed the direction of their assault, trying to cut the BEF off from its homeland by capturing the Channel ports. The loss of Antwerp on October 9th and the shift to the Channel ports in western Flanders marked the "Race to the Sea," the second phase of the invasion. The "race" ended at the Belgian coast when the Belgian army withdrew to the region between Diksmuide and the port of Nieuwpoort on the North Sea. The Belgian, French, British and German armies attempted to lead offensives, leading to the Battle of the IJzer (October 16th to November 11th) and, to the south, the First Battle of Ieper (Ypres) (October 19th to November 22nd).

On October 14th, the Belgian army began to create a defensive line, most of which was on a polder—reclaimed land from the sea that was below sea level—near Nieuwpoort. On October 16th, the German army attacked Diksmuide. The town was defended by both Belgian and French troops, while the Allies marshalled a small naval force along the Belgian coast to shell the advancing German infantry. The German army began its advance toward the Belgian line on October 18th. In order to halt German progress, the Belgians decided to open the series of locks at Nieuwpoort, called the Ganzepoot (or “goose foot”): a network of gates that controls the balance of the water on the IJzer Plain. The strategic idea came from a staff officer, Captain Prudent Nuyten, who proposed that by controlling the sluice gates at the Ganzepoot, the polders to the east of Nieuwpoort held by the German army could be filled by the sea, creating a natural barrier between the two armies (Demerre 1914: 52).<sup>2</sup>

The lock-keepers had fled Nieuwpoort as the Germans arrived, leaving the Ganzepoot unattended, so there were few personnel remaining to respond to Captain Nuyten’s idea. But two local men had knowledge of the system: Karel Cogge (1855–1922), Superintendent of the Northern Waterways of Veurne, who knew the system, and Hendrick Geeraert (1863–1925), a local skipper who ultimately was the one to open the locks. On October 29th, after an unsuccessful attempt, the Noordvaart Gates were opened, and the North Sea gradually rose in the low fields following the line of the IJzer River. The flooded area, framed by the Belgian railway line which worked as a dike and riverbank, was roughly 1.6 km wide and stretched from the sea down to Diksmuide. A company of lock engineers led by Commander Robert Thys (1884–1964) was created the following year to maintain the water levels for the duration of the war. In the summer, the area needed to be topped up, and during the winter, the Belgian artillery shelled the frozen surface to break it up.

Behind the inundation was the Nieuwpoort-Diksmuide railway that, due to the flooded plains in front, remained for the duration of the war the divisional and defensive line between the German and Belgian armies. By November, only a small portion of Belgium remained free, with most of it under German occupation.<sup>3</sup> In the following weeks, a number of areas around Diksmuide were also flooded. King Albert relocated to the town of De Panne, whereas the Belgian government was established in Saint Adresse (near Le Havre) in France. The inundation ended the “Race to the Sea” and the war of movement that had previously characterized the first months of the war. As such it saved the communication lines of the



BEF and prevented the French army from being outflanked and the Belgian army from being crushed, and though reduced to a tiny stretch of unoccupied land, Belgium remained a participant in the war.

## 2 CULTURAL MEMORY<sup>4</sup>

During the war and in the immediate post-war years, the success of the inundation was noted in several publications, as well as a few advertisements that capitalized on the pluck and determination of the beleaguered Belgian army. These sources reached a wide, but primarily educated public, acknowledging the event as part of the progress of the war. In 1915, two accounts of the inundation, one from a Belgian perspective and the other from the French army, were published in C.F. Horne's *Great Events of the Great War*. Henri Carton de Wiart, Belgium's Chairman of the Governmental Propaganda Committee during the war, published *The Battle of the Yser: Belgium Opens Her Dykes to save a Fragment of Her Territory* (Carton de Wiart 1923), and the French General Joseph Joffre (1852–1931) wrote *The Battle of the Yser* (Joffre 1923). Richard Wilson addressed the inundation in his 1916 book *The First Year of the Great War* (with the wonderful subtitle: *Being the Story of the First Phase of the Great War Struggling for Honour, Justice, and Truth. Told for Boys and Girls of the British Empire*) in a chapter entitled "The Fight for the Coast" (Wilson 1916). Paul Azan, a lieutenant colonel in the French army who was wounded on the IJzer, wrote an account of the flooding in *Les Belges sur l'Yser*, published in Paris in 1929 (Azan 1929). In 1918, the American company Bell Telephone published an advertisement lauding the courage and ingenuity of the Belgian army in patriotic support of U.S. troops. A heroic image of the Belgian army is featured defending a trench behind a tangle of barbed wire. One soldier stands, exposed, at the top of the trench manning a machine gun against the advancing German army. The text, in part, reads:

Four years ago the Belgian Army, war-worn and weak in numbers, confronted the Germans on the Yser [IJzer]. From Liege to the last narrow strip of their country they had resisted the invaders inch by inch, glorious even in retreat.

At the Yser [IJzer], the Belgians performed a signal service to the Allied cause by holding the Germans while the gaps were being closed in the Franco-British line to the rear.

Four years have passed, and the same nations are at death grips along the Western Front. America, too, is there and has this opportunity because the Belgians kept the enemy from crossing the Yser long ago. [...] the telephone service has an increasingly important part in speeding the national effort.

Considering these examples in both historical narrative and popular culture, it is surprising how little the inundation is addressed after Jos Vols's 1964 overview of the events in a small book called *Overstromingen in de IJzerstreek* [*The Flooding in the IJzer Zone*]. While the flooding is noted in a few tourist guides and academic publications in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century (Verbeke 1981; Cowley 1989; van Pul 1994; Vanleene and Bauwens 2004), the story disappeared in the region, becoming invisible for both tourists and residents alike. The flooding of the IJzer was reintroduced to the British public in an exhibition at the London Canal Museum in 2014. Focusing on the roles of canals during the war, the museum explained the intricacies of the IJzer canal waterways through an exhibition and a small catalogue. But the accompanying map that illustrated the flooding erroneously suggested that the area *behind* the Nieuwpoort-Diksmuide railway was subsequently flooded after October 29th (Halsey 2015). Clearly, on the eve of the centenary there was still misunderstanding about this critical event.

Two memorials, a British monument dedicated to the missing and a site-specific Belgian monument, were erected near the Ganzepoot.<sup>5</sup> The Belgian Memorial, by Nieuwpoort native Pieter-Jan Braecke (1858–1938), was dedicated on July 1st, 1928. The memorial is located near the Ganzepoot. Aloft on a heavy pedestal, it features an allegorical figure of Belgium protecting the Belgian crown. Inscribed on several of the blocks that support *België* is the letter 'v', which stands for *vaderlandertje*, a nickname for the sandbags.<sup>6</sup> Four soldiers surround the base of the sculpture. One is blind, one is wounded, and a third holds his medals. The fourth shares space with a lion, the symbol of the Kingdom of Belgium. Between the soldiers is the coat of arms of Belgium. Adjacent to both monuments is the Albert Memorial. The king's role on the coast during the war was acknowledged in 1938, four years after his death, through an initiative by Belgian veterans of the war whereby a memorial was raised in his honour along the mouth of the river IJzer.<sup>7</sup> The circular monument resembles a crown held aloft by columns, which were constructed of bricks made from mud of the IJzer valley. At the centre is a plinth with a statue of Albert in the Roman tradition as soldier/king. The memorial rises above Nieuwpoort

with the king heroically silhouetted against the sea to the north and the expansive Flemish landscape to the south. The accompanying text reads:

Not long ago, here, the King gathered his regiments and as soon as he spoke to them, gone to ground on the plain, feet in water, covered in mud and out of breath, they changed the Yser into a rampart. (August van Cauwelaert and Maurice Gauchez)<sup>8</sup>

There are similar monuments to Albert as soldier-king that follow the path of the German invasion from Namur, Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent, Bruges and, finally, Nieuwpoort.

In order to reach a local audience, for whom the literary accounts would not have been accessible,<sup>9</sup> a few commemorative pieces of visual culture were installed after mid-century in order to make Cogge and Geeraert a permanent part of Nieuwpoort's public spaces. In Veurne and Nieuwpoort, streets are named after the two men. Embedded into quotidian activity, the commemorative street names merge the past into ordinary settings of human life, though perhaps becoming too familiar to be acknowledged or even associated with the events of 1914. Both towns also display the obligatory bust portraits of each man. The Albert memorial and the busts of Cogge and Geeraert serve national interests. As James Young notes, these types of memorial have a land-anchored permanence that also guarantee the permanence of the memory, or idea, attached to them (Young 1993: 3). Young's premise is that monuments are subject to change. New generations visit the sites and invest them with new meanings. I argue that in Nieuwpoort, it is not so much that the meanings have changed but that the objects dedicated to the individuals who were key to the inundation have become invisible.

In 1950, on the centenary of the founding of the Bank of Belgium, a note was issued with King Albert I on the front and Geeraert on the reverse. The king is presented in a suit and bow tie, which is how he was often presented to the public in the propaganda published during the war, while Geeraert is dressed in workman's clothing and placed against the backdrop of the flooded plain. The two sides of the bill underscore that civilian and royalty, common man and military, worked together in that desperate period. In the twenty-first century, two pastimes in Belgium, biking and drinking beer, were enlisted in commemoration promotions. A cycling route in the area named for Cogge and Geeraert is sponsored by the Province of West Flanders and Westtour, a recreational and tourism

company that works with the Flemish province and local municipalities. The ubiquitous red poppy, a symbol that signals that this is a war route, is prominent on all of the signage along the route. The route follows the history of the inundation through various memorials and historic sites, including the Albert I monument, the Belgian military cemeteries in Steenkerke and Ramscapelle, the bust portrait of Cogge, the Ganzepoot, and the former railway. There are similar biking routes along the Western Front in Flanders, particularly in and around Ieper. During the years of the centenary, Geeraert and Cogge's portraits and the landscape of Nieuwpoort during the war years have graced several commercial products, including a commemorative beer. The portraits of the two men grace the labels. Geeraert is on a blonde and Cogge on a brown ale. The Geeraert label reads: "A beer to be given some extra attention. In 2013, [Geeraert was] elected as an All Time Greatest Newport Knight in the Order of Leopold. [He was a] legendary figure in the Field Army from 1914 to 1918". The label with Cogge notes: "Knight in the Order of Leopold since 1914. A Veurne HERO". An alternative labels depicts a silhouette of Cogge against the flooded land. The glasses in which the beer is served feature a figure atop a pint with a foamy head. He holds a lock key in his hand that reaches to the bottom of the glass.<sup>10</sup> For the centenary, the Memorial Museum Passchendaele in Zonnebeke, which was part of the Ieper Salient to the south, lent one of its famous photographs of the war to Passchendaele Beer. The Brewery Van Honsebrouck donates part of the proceeds to the municipality of Zonnebeke for the maintenance of local war memorials.

### 3 COLLECTED MEMORY: THE WESTFRONT NIEUWPOORT VISITOR CENTRE

Given the flurry of academic, amateur, and commercial activity occasioned by the centenary throughout Belgium, including Brussels and both Flanders and Wallonia, the city of Nieuwpoort turned its attention to its own history, looking to capitalize both academically and commercially on the unique role the town played in the first months of the war. An institutionalized history of a localized story seemed to be in order, following the precedent established in other towns and sites from Nieuwpoort down through Diksmuide, Ieper, Zonnebeke, and Ploegsteert. Prior to the centenary, even the local tour guides knew little about the inundation.<sup>11</sup>

A memorial is often associated with places of mourning, while monuments are essentially markers of an achievement or of a heroic individual. Arthur Danto has written that “we erect monuments so that we shall always remember, and build memorials so that we shall never forget” (Danto 1987: 112). In the Westfront Nieuwpoort Visitor Centre the distinction is collapsed since the site chosen was a site of battle, but also a site of triumph. Thus, following Young, the memory site is in itself a memorial and the objects in the vicinity, the Nieuwpoort and the Albert memorials and the centre itself, are the monuments that continue to attempt to assert a physical presence since the living memory of October 29th, 1914 is no longer retrievable (Young 1993: 4). But in its very name, the Westfront Nieuwpoort Visitor Centre does not evoke a museum or a memorial, but a place that invites tourists. This strategic naming may help ensure that the centre’s life continues beyond the centenary. Only in the word “Westfront” does the centre betray its remit. The materials within are collected diary entries and interviews with those at the IJzer during the crucial weeks. Objects that key figures once owned, paintings and photographs that captured the unfolding of the devastation are placed side-by-side with military documents that take visitors through Nieuwpoort and the war itself. In these physical traces, the stories and items become the pieces of a collected memory, made from individual memory, that informs our present of the events of a distant past.

A very basic idea for a visitor centre was broached by Geert Bourgeois, the Minister—President of Flanders and Flemish Minister for Foreign Policy and Immovable Heritage, wanting to promote Flanders within the larger picture of the centenary. His concept was launched in London in 2013 at the Tourist World Fair with three locations receiving the bulk of the financial support for centenary projects: a visitor centre at the Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery next to a field hospital close to Poperinge, the town famous for British war-time assistance; a new exhibition for the “In Flanders Fields Museum” in Ieper (Ypres); and a visitor centre at Nieuwpoort. Project Manager Patrick Vanleene, a local World War I historian and independent researcher, was engaged to solicit designs for the visitor centre and to curate a permanent exhibition. Unlike many of the museums along the Western Front, which were renovated in preparation for the centenary, the Westfront Nieuwpoort Visitor Centre was created from scratch. It was a daunting task, as the museum committee negotiated with various private and public organizations including NATO to secure enough land in and around the desired site. The museum opened on

October 18th, 2014, just in time to meet the upcoming anniversary of the inundation.

In the Westfront Nieuwpoort Visitor Centre, the geography of the region is presented through both a cultural and political lens. This approach seeks to affirm national identity through a site-specific topography of the conflict. The monumentality of the event is marked through two spectacles: a panoramic painting detailing the material devastation of Flanders, and the views from the Centre to the water of Nieuwpoort. The choices made in exhibition content reflect a re-evaluation on the particular circumstances of the war in Flanders to underscore and assert a Belgian history within the larger, and arguably more famous, narrative of the British participation in the war as it unfolded in the Ieper Salient to the south. Two other smaller museums are dedicated to specific histories of the region. The newly inaugurated Lange Max Museum, a private institution in Koekelare just north of Diksmuide, focuses on the relationship between the German troops and the citizens of Koekelare. The ANZAC Rest Museum, a small café museum outside Zonnebeke, addresses the discovery and identification of the bodies of two Australian soldiers within a local history of the region and the battle of Polygon Wood, which took place during the second phase of the Third Battle of Ieper (The Battle of Passchendaele) (September 26 and 27, 1917). Westfront Nieuwpoort is the only museum dedicated to a single event. Through its site-specific location and exhibition content, visitors are literally immersed in the story from October 1914.

The Westfront Nieuwpoort Visitor's Centre is located beneath the King Albert Memorial; it appears to be almost submerged within the Ganzepoot (Fig. 11.1). Views from the circular interior direct visitors' gazes outward; almost all of the exhibitions orient the visitor to the sea and the Nieuwpoort locks.<sup>12</sup> Little of the exhibition narrative is dedicated to King Albert; the focus is on the geographic locale (the landscape being the last witness) in which the events unfolded and on the individuals responsible for the inundation. There are few references to any high-ranking military personnel. The narrative draws on first-person accounts of the decision-makers, often noting and underscoring the inherent contradictions among the multiplicity of voices utilized to create a coherent whole for a master narrative. It is a small museum; in less than an hour, the exhibition guides the visitor through a chronological narrative of autumn 1914.

Half of the museum is dedicated to the Ganzepoot and the inundation. A timeline takes the visitor from the decision-making process to the



**Fig. 11.1** Westfront Nieuwpoort (Photograph courtesy of [airmaniacs.be](http://airmaniacs.be))

opening of the locks, and through the consequences of the drowning of the Flemish landscape. As one proceeds further into the museum, a series of interactive kiosks provide a multiplicity of perspectives on the flooding of the IJzer Plain, both from the Belgian army and through first-person narratives by civilians such as Cogge, Geeraert, and Thys. A German captain is quoted as noting that “the enemy floods the foreland. The ditches around the farm where our company is stationed are slowly swelling. It sounds like the babbling of a waterfall.” Through this and similar information, the museum takes great care to dispel many of the myths associated with the inundation, the most common being that many Germans drowned as a result. The water rose gradually, and all but a very few had time to withdraw. Photographs of the scale of the locks and all of the difficulties inherent within the mechanisms of the system are highlighted. The unique situation of this war front is noted through the inclusion of a diving suit—equipment not commonly found in museums dedicated to the Great War. But since the integrity of the Ganzepoot was essential to the survival of those behind the Belgian line, divers routinely descended to the bottom of the canal to check for damage from German shells.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the permanent exhibition, the museum also has a space reserved for temporary presentations. In its first year, the presentation highlighted Nieuwpoort, prior to the advent of war, as a thriving resort town. A series of photographs, posters, and postcards proclaimed the town as a seaside attraction. In October 1914, this tranquillity was



disrupted by the arrival of Belgian soldiers fleeing the siege of Antwerp accompanied by refugees from eastern Belgium. The text at this display sets the tone for the museum: at Nieuwpoort, on the IJzer, the Belgians fought back. For the visitor, something in the permanent narrative would be lost without this exhibition. The photographs and text inform visitors that on October 18th, the Battle of the IJzer began placing the history, and necessity, of the inundation within the specifics of both the war and the town of Nieuwpoort and the surrounding Flemish villages. The two armies dug themselves in across the dunes and along the banks of the river. As a result, Nieuwpoort became the starting point of the subsequent 40,000 km of trenches that mark the Front in Belgium.<sup>14</sup> Portions of Belgian trenches, which served as tourist destinations soon after the Armistice, are now managed by the Royal Army Museum. The Dodengang (Trench of Death) is the site of the only remaining original section of the Belgian trenches. A small museum at the Dodengang in Diksmuide explains the effect of the IJzer flooding in this region south of Nieuwpoort and outlines the additional flooding of the IJzer in and around Diksmuide.<sup>15</sup> Westfront Nieuwpoort, in its permanent exhibition, opens with diagrams, mock-ups and text that explain the sophisticated engineering of the Ganzepoot. A touch-screen interactive game, combined with information on how the Nieuwpoort locks function, is included in order to engage younger visitors.

First person narratives are utilized throughout the museum, placing an emphasis on archival sources such as diaries and letters from those who experienced the arrival of the refugees (Juul Filliaert, journalist, and Jules Vermeulen, a local parish priest), the battle that commenced on October 18th (Jozef Gesquière) and the inundation (Geeraert). All information, as in most of the museums along the Front, is translated into the four languages of the war: Dutch, French, German, and English. Object-oriented displays, which the museum calls “silent witnesses of the German advance and the Battle of the IJzer”, guide visitors through the centre. The viewing cases include Queen Elizabeth’s helmet (to be worn if she were to ever visit the Front line), King Albert’s sabre, presented to him by France in 1915 in gratitude for his role during the invasion and the Battle of the IJzer, posters presented by Nieuwpoort to serve as a public address in reassuring the citizens, and many newspaper clippings and headlines that reported on the Battle of the IJzer and the inundation.

Four actors on video screens narrate the story of the inundation, conveying historical information from the perspective of Captain-Commander



Prudent Nuyten (1874–1954), a member of the Belgian General Staff, who was one of the first to consider how to flood the plain; Geeraert; Cogge; and Thys. As in the majority of the Westfront Nieuwpoort Centre exhibits, viewers look to and then beyond the videos to the Ganzepoot. The scale of the videos is effective; one feels as if engaged with each character. A similar technique, in which the actors assume the identity of various war personnel, is utilized at the “In Flanders Fields Museum” in Ieper (Ypres).

#### 4 HET IJZERPANORAMA, 1914

The primary source of information is a facsimile of a section of the *Panorama of the IJzer 1914 (Het IJzerpanorama 1914)* by Alfred Bastien (1873–1955), which illustrates the devastation in Flanders. The original painting measures 115 × 14 meters (four times the size of the digital reproduction in Westfront Nieuwpoort) and captures the entirety of the Front line from the sea to Ieper. Bastien conceived the painting in 1914 while he was an artist in service for the Belgian Army in the recently established *Section documentaire Artistique de l'Armée en Campagne*. Starting in 1915, he made paintings and sketches of the Belgian line along the IJzer River.<sup>16</sup> The panorama was intended to depict scenes as accurately as possible using artistic techniques such as tilted planes, curved painted backgrounds, and a modified scale for the objects. The goal was to reinforce the illusion through a false perspective of a realistic view of a large scene in a compact space from one central viewing point (Kamcke and Hutterer 2015: 8). It was designed to give people the illusion of being surrounded by real landscape. The size and scope enveloped viewers in a new experience, allowing them to travel beyond their limited geographical region. Historically, the panorama was one of the most popular visual pleasures of the nineteenth century. Stephan Oettermann notes that the panorama served to glorify the bourgeois view of the world (Oettermann 1997: 7). It was set to mimic the pleasures of unobstructed and expansive views from mountaintops, towers, and other elevated sites. The word “panorama”, coined by the British inventor Robert Barker, means “see everything” (Neumann 2008: 48). But, as Oettermann points out, the nineteenth-century panorama also served to enclose the visitor, who was centrally placed within a 360-degree painting. In 1883, Anton van Werner’s introduction of the war panorama in a representation of the Franco-Prussian War changed the formerly bucolic enjoyment of the pan-

orama. In accounts of the unveiling of the *Battle of Sedan*, it was noted that passers-by became eyewitnesses to the battle that unfolded before them (Sternberger and Neugroschel 1977: 4). At the museum, Bastien's panorama functions to situate the visitor as a participant, and, specifically for the Flemish visitors, to locate them within a nationalist narrative of the destruction of their homeland.

The *Panorama* was painted in 1921–1924 and exhibited in the Panorama Cairo located at the Cinquantenaire on Boulevard Lemonier in Brussels. Because the painting was so large, it surrounded the viewer with an almost three-dimensional appearance that was enhanced by a realistic middle ground between the viewer and the painting (Neumann 2008: 50). This provided a transition from the three-dimensional objects in the foreground to the two-dimensional surface of the panorama. Over 800,000 people viewed the *Panorama* in Brussels, including royalty from the countries engaged in the Great War. The success of the exhibition was covered by the media, underscoring the fact that in the immediate post-war years there was widespread knowledge of the inundation in the north of the Belgian Front. In 1926, the *Panorama* was displayed in Oostende, a seaside town to the east of Nieuwpoort, to draw the British tourists who were arriving across the channel by steamer to visit battlefields and gravesites. Postcards and prints were sold in the exhibitions in Brussels and Oostende, spreading knowledge of the Western Front in Flanders (reproductions of the battles of the Ieper Salient were particularly popular) to a larger audience through the *Panorama*. It is appropriate that it is to the same painting to which Westfront Nieuwpoort turned at the centenary for an explanation of 1914–1918. Beyond Westfront Nieuwpoort, replicas of portions of the *Panorama* (on a much smaller scale) that are pertinent to the battles on the Ieper Salient are included in the “In Flanders Fields Museum”.

When Oostende was bombed during a raid in 1940, the building in which the *Panorama* was exhibited was severely damaged. The *Panorama* itself was severely damaged.<sup>17</sup> Much too fragile (and famous) to be hung in Nieuwpoort, the pertinent portions of the painting were digitally reproduced and reduced to fit the interior of the centre for maximum effect. The original *Panorama* was displayed in a circle, and spectators sat in the middle. This is partially duplicated in Nieuwpoort, (the entire painting is shown but on a screen in the form of a semi-circle.) The *Panorama* in Nieuwpoort begins with scenes of the dunes at Nieuwpoort and a motorcade of German prisoners of war who are accompanied by French Spahis

(Moroccan soldiers who fought for France). Bastien included views of the Flemish seaside resort of Middelkerke in the distance. Another view portrays the Belgian Queen Elizabeth visiting the Front near a dressing station while wounded Belgian and French soldiers are brought in by ambulance carts. The *Panorama* on view at Westfront Nieuwpoort provides a personal and factual narrative compiled from the fragmentary sketches Bastien made while at this Front. He included the material devastation of the war on the Flemish landscape and the damage to military equipment, the wounded and dead soldiers, and the port of Nieuwpoort. The first of the trenches are included, demonstrating the initial strategies taken after the stalemate began in the autumn of 1914. It is even clearly noted that the trenches are held by French soldiers of the 42nd Infantry Regiment. The *Panorama* contains details of the fighting in and around Nieuwpoort emphasizing pivotal events that led to the inundation. He depicts the nights of October 21st and 22nd, when the Germans were able to build a temporary bridge over the IJzer River, the arrival of the Belgian soldiers from the 2nd and 4th Line Regiment and the French Colonial, and two batteries with 75 mm cannon. This attention to detail serves to underscore the *Panorama* as a historical document as well as a theatrical presentation for the public. With the disappearance of the *Panorama* from public discourse in 1982, the events of this region also disappeared from a collective public memory.

Bastien's *Panorama* dominates half the museum. With the waters of Nieuwpoort behind and the wall of landscape in front, the visitor is enveloped in the essentials of the event. This is further accentuated by the chilly temperature of the museum, which does little to provide respite from the cold winds and grey sky and water of northern Flanders just outside the glass panels. Because the scale is reduced, the viewer is not enclosed as in nineteenth-century presentations. But fixed within the underground centre between the Ganzepoot and sea level views of the Nieuwpoort port, the panorama is able to function as intended by Bastien. As Quatremère de Quincy remarked in 1822, it was the art of architecture that made the panorama possible. The contemporary version of the 1924 rotunda in Oostende (which also duplicates the circular form of the Albert memorial above) enables viewers to experience the *Panorama* in a way similar to that which Bastien intended. While nineteenth-century panoramas made an engagement with a remote geographic location viable (Neumann 2008: 51), the Bastien panorama makes time travel, as it were, possible for the twenty-first-century visitor, who, through photographs and other smaller

artworks, is able to “visit” the scenes of battle that would remain otherwise inaccessible. This immersion in the past is a key component in several museums along the Western Front that use re-enactments or living history programmes to create a bridge between the museology and an emotional experience to the war.

Historically, the panorama was replaced with the cinema, which more convincingly transported viewers into other worlds (Neumann 2008: 54). Films from the war were captured by photographers from all of the belligerents as well as Germany. These men were placed with specific units along the Front (Rochet n.d.: [www.tmgonline.nl](http://www.tmgonline.nl)). The Belgian Army Film Unit (*Cinematografische dienst van het Belgisch leger/Service cinématographique de l'armée belge*) (SCAB) was established in 1916. The men assigned to the unit recorded at the Front between 1916 and the end of the war. In the early twentieth century, cinema was considered a new form of spectacle. It was close to both theatre and photography and brought the enveloping stillness of the panorama to life. At Westfront Nieuwpoort, portions of SCAB's films pierce the *Panorama*. Since Bastien's painting is a facsimile of the original damaged canvas, his meticulous details are difficult to discern. The black-and-white films provide a moving narrative to further engage viewers. A white border serves to draw attention to the detail to be enhanced, and, as that detail is enlarged, the film replaces the digitized painting for roughly a minute. These small frames echo the dominant theme of Westfront Nieuwpoort, which provides framed views of the Ganzepoot.

In the initial temporary exhibition, which addressed Nieuwpoort specifically in relation to the war, a *Rundbild* was included that served to counter the narrative of the *Panorama* and introduced the German perspective. The *Rundbild*, a photographic document of military tactics, indicated the marks of the battle along the coastline that stretched from Nieuwpoort-Stad to Nieuwpoort-Bad, a no-man's land of barbed wire, shell holes, and trenches that cut across the line of dunes down to the sea—the northern-most point of the Western Front.<sup>18</sup> The photographs, taken in 1917, are marked with a blue stamp, indicating that they were top-secret, for official use only (*Nur für den Dienstgebrauch*). They were used to determine future targets and assess the damage already inflicted from German bombardment.

In 2016, the temporary exhibition De Groote Oorlog op Doek [The Great War on Canvas] featured a small group of artists who settled in Nieuwpoort (in a cellar near the lock complex) and painted for the same

*Section documentaire* to which Bastien had belonged. Prior to the war, many artists visited Nieuwpoort to sketch the picturesque seascapes and charming village. The paintings, even those in colourful hues, documented the devastation from 1916 to the years after the war. The artists, who included André-Victor Lynen (1888–1984), Léon Huygens (1876–1919), Archiel van Sassenbrouck (1886–1979), and Bastien, painted Nieuwpoort in ruins; the unchanging and tedious landscape of the flooded polder that could also appear quite lovely and serene; and marching Belgian soldiers on patrol. The exhibit, mounted at the centenary of the artists' deployment, provides an insider's perspective of the war and also a small window on the wide variety of artistic practice of the early twentieth century. There is clear evidence of a traditional nineteenth-century realism, as in Bastien's small canvases and his *Panorama*, as well as influences from both the colours and bold brush strokes of the Fauvism that lingered in Belgian art practice after its 1905 French debut, and Expressionism, which was modified from its German foundation in 1911. Placed within the vistas of Westfront Nieuwpoort, the paintings enlarge visitor experience between the two landscapes of 1916 and 2016 in a manner similar to the function of the *Panorama*.

Some of the artists who painted at the IJzer Front after the war took liberties with the narrative, creating staged fabrications for maximum impact. For example, in a watercolour by Edmond van Offel (1871–1959), *Koning Albert ziet de verschrikkingen van de oolog aan den IJzer* [King Albert Sees the Horrors of the War on the IJzer] (1925–1931) that was on display at Westfront Nieuwpoort in 2014, the viewer is led through a blood-soaked landscape into the flooded mouth of the IJzer via the duckboards to graves of the dead and an infinite watery vista. Composed as a small triptych, the central panel depicts a weary Belgian soldier, and sand-bagged trenches frame this view. King Albert, accompanied by the British and French generals in chief, is placed in the foreground and draws the viewer's attention with a blue uniform that is a stark contrast to the khaki of the soldiers who surround him. Duckboards lead the sight line to a submerged Flemish village in a flooded field. From the side panels, the death and destruction of the war intrude into this central scene through an artillery gun, a wounded soldier's feet on a stretcher, and a menacing British tank. The tank, added here for dramatic effect, would have been employed in the late stages of the war on the Somme and at Ieper, but not at Nieuwpoort where the mud and water of the inundation would have hindered the progress of such heavy machinery.<sup>19</sup>

At the end of the visit, a small staircase leads visitors to the King Albert Monument. The perimeter provides views of the sluice gates, the IJzer estuary, and the sea, underscoring how strategically important Nieuwpoort was for both the Germans and the Belgians. Far on the horizon, on the rare clear day, visitors can see the “Museum aan de IJzer”, housed in the IJzertoren, a bipartisan monument in Diksmuide raised in commemoration of the Flemish soldiers in the Belgian army. This view serves to unite the two ends of the flooded land. On October 17th, 2014 in remembrance of the centenary of the inundation, Nieuwpoort and Diksmuide were linked once again through a program called the *Lichtfront*. A string of 8,750 hand-held torches lit 84 km of the trench lines, the scars of battle still discernible in the Flemish landscape. The line of light traced the war in West Flanders as it unfolded south from the sea to Ieper and Zonnebeke.

## 5 CONCLUSION

The Westfront Nieuwpoort Visitor’s Centre highlights the very specific and unique events that unfolded at the estuary of the IJzer River, highlighting the vital role the Belgians played in the first months of the Great War. As noted at Westfront Nieuwpoort, during the war and in the immediate post-war years, the events at the Ganzepoot came to symbolize a small country that had successfully defended itself through the ingenuity and collaboration of civilians and the Belgian army. After 1918, memorials were erected, the individuals involved commemorated, and souvenirs produced to remember the events. It is through these objects and institutions that the Ganzepoot and surrounds have become *lieux des mémoires* at which the material, symbolic, and functional aspects of memory stand in as a substitute for a memory that no living person possesses. The archival traces of those who witnessed the inundation and the architectural space in which these remnants are held serve to revive the history of an event no longer recalled by the people themselves instantiated only by the objects and spaces that remain.

And while it is no longer a footnote in the larger narrative of the war, taking centre stage in the northern line of the Western Front, it is not clear how this story, or the Centre, will survive after 2018. While a pivotal event for Belgium, the Belgian army, and the war as a whole, the inundation at Nieuwpoort risks being inundated itself by the more famous history of Flanders Fields to the south. From the opening day on October 18th, 2014 to the end of that year, 20,770 people visited Westfront Nieuwpoort.

There was great excitement at the centenary moment of the flooding of the IJzer Plain. The following year, January through December, the numbers reached 46,461. But in 2016, visitation dropped to roughly 31,000 and is expected to decrease.<sup>20</sup> After 2018, tourists to the seaside will be courted in promotional materials, and school groups will continue to attend lectures at the museum. Designed to promote cultural tourism in the region, it is an all-weather attraction for the thousands of sun-seeking tourists who come to the Belgian coast in the summer and it is an extra activity for the schools that visit the IJzer estuary in spring every year. As Patrick Vanleene, stresses, Westfront Nieuwpoort is not a museum, but a visitor centre. It serves as an introduction to the Belgian role in World War I, to the Flemish landscape, and to the museums further inland, which include the Museum aan de IJzer in Diksmuide; the Lange Max Museum in Koekelare; “In Flanders Fields Museum”; and Talbot House in Poperinge, that expand upon the history of the war as it unfolded in this region. Westfront Nieuwpoort Visitor Centre addresses the role of the Belgian with the support of the Royal Army Museum in Brussels and serves a key role in the promotion of a Belgian history for the younger generations to counter the presentation of the Great War as a British war that began at Ieper.<sup>21</sup>

## NOTES

1. In both museums the inundation is acknowledged through short text panels in the first rooms of the exhibitions. The In Flanders Fields Museum includes a photograph of the King Albert Memorial.
2. Nieuwpoort already had more than a 400-year history of flooding for defensive purposes. But, due to changes in the national defence programme in the nineteenth century, the sluices, locks, and doors were altered to only allow for normal drainage purposes. Guido Demerre, “A Kingdom Saved by the Sea,” *Underwater Cultural Heritage from World War I* (UNESCO: 1914), 52.
3. For further information, see Paul van Pul (2006).
4. Here I use cultural memory as defined by Marita Sturken who suggest that cultural memory is memory outside of the traditional avenues of historical discourse entangled with cultural products and imbued with cultural meaning. Cultural memory differs from collected memory through a self-consciousness with which notions of culture are attached to what we consider to be objects of memory. Sturken, *Tangled Memories* (Los Angeles: University of California Press 1997), 3.

5. The British Nieuwpoort Memorial to the Missing notes the 566 names of British officers and men with no known grave who were killed in the Siege of Antwerp in 1914 and near Nieuwpoort in 1917. It was designed by William Bryce Binnie (1886–1963), who served with the Royal Highland Regiment during the war. He was an architect for the Imperial War Graves commission. Charles Sargeant Jagger (1885–1934), also a veteran of the Western Front, designed the three lions that are located at each point of the triangular platform.
6. *Vaderlandertje* roughly translates as “small father land”. The diminutive ending of *-ertje* suggests a pet name or familiarity equating the sandbags with the soldiers themselves, both of which served as a stand-in for the defence of Belgium, the fatherland.
7. Julien de Ridder designed the memorial and Karl Aubroeck (1894–1986) the statue of Albert. Both were inaugurated on July 24, 1938.
8. August van Cauwelaert (1885–1945), a Flemish poet, was wounded at Passchendaele. Maurice Gauchez (1884–1957), a poet and French-language novelist, was wounded at the Battle of the IJzer.
9. Many were published in English.
10. Proceeds from sales benefit an organization called Mama’s Kinderen that seeks to alleviate the poverty of children in the region.
11. Interview, Patrick Vanleene, July 6, 2016.
12. The technique of making the exterior an integral part of the museum narrative and grounding the museum in its site-specificity is utilized in the Getty Museum (Richard Meier 1997), with its vistas of Los Angeles, the San Gabriel Mountains, and the Pacific Ocean and, more recently, the Whitney Museum of American Art (Renzo Piano 2015), which incorporates views of New York City.
13. In 2014, UNESCO established a research network to examine underwater heritage of the Great War. Scientific research focused on diving suits, shipwrecks, and weapons found in the sea, rivers, and canals.
14. The end of mobile warfare and the establishment of trench warfare occurred at the First Battle of the Aisne (September 13–28, 1914).
15. Panoramas of the flooding around Diksmuide are visible from the Museum aan de IJzer, a museum housed in a twenty-six-storey memorial dedicated to the Flemish men of the Belgian army who died during the war.
16. Bastien’s work was regularly published in *The Illustrated War News*, often in semi-panoramic two-page spreads. From 1917 to 1918, he worked for the Canadian Army producing works that addressed the Canadian war experience.
17. The painting was moved to the Royal Army Museum in Brussels in 1951 for restoration and was on view for the public in the current aviation room. In 1982, it was noted that the initial restoration was poorly done, and the



painting was taken down and cut into nine panels and stored at a barracks near Namur. It is currently awaiting further restoration. In addition to the need for extensive restoration, there is not at present an appropriate space for the panorama to be exhibited. The Westfront viewing of the painting is the next best thing.

18. The photographs for the Rundebild were taken by the Marine-Felleballon-Abteilung. Wall-text, Westfront Nieuwpoort Centre.
19. Thanks go to Sophie de Schaepdrijver who pointed out the improbability of the inclusion of the tank at the IJzer Front.
20. Interview, Isabelle Mahieu, July 16, 2016.
21. Many thanks to Patrick Vanleene for conversations in the initial stages of the project and feedback on the final draft.

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