THE LION, THE ROOSTER, AND THE UNION: NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE BELGIAN CLANDESTINE PRESS, 1914-1918

by

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Abstract

Significant research has been conducted on the trials and tribulations of Belgium during the First World War. While amateur historians can often summarize the “Rape of Belgium” and cite nationalism as a cause of the war, few people are aware of the substantial contributions of the Belgian people to the war effort and their significance, especially in the historical context of Belgian nationalism. Relatively few works have been written about the underground press in Belgium during the war, and even fewer of those works are scholarly. The Belgian underground press attempted to unite the country's two major national identities, Flemings and Walloons, using the German occupation as the catalyst to do so. Belgian nationalists were able to momentarily unite the Belgian people to resist their German occupiers by publishing pro-Belgian newspapers and articles. They relied on three pillars of identity—Catholic heritage, loyalty to the Belgian Crown, and anti-German sentiment. While this expansion of Belgian identity dissipated to an extent after WWI, the efforts of the clandestine press still serve as an important framework for the development of national identity today. By examining how the clandestine press convinced members of two separate nations, Flanders and Wallonia, to re-imagine their community to the nation of Belgium, historians can analyze the successful expansion of a nation in a war-time context.

Introduction

As tram twenty-seven pulled into Brussels' Station de la Bourse in the summer of 1915, printer Louis Allaer contemplated how he would manage to make his delivery to his awaiting colleague. On the tram, Allaer found himself surrounded by German soldiers returning from the *Tir national* shooting range, the very location where his contact would be executed in part for his role in distributing the parcel's contents later the same year. Unbeknownst to Allaer, many of the Belgians who played a role in the production of the contents had already been arrested by the German secret police. As he prepared to descend from the tram, Allaer asked the tram's conductor for assistance with the nearly fifty-pound package. At this, a pair of German soldiers headed toward Allaer. By 1915 almost all Belgians had heard of German soldiers investigating packages for contraband on a whim. To Allaer's relief, the soldiers instead simply offered to carry the package onto the platform for him and, after handing it to Allaer, re-boarded the tram. Contained within the parcel were four thousand freshly printed copies of *La Libre Belgique*, a clandestinely published pro-Belgian journal.[1]

First printed in February 1915, *La Libre Belgique* declared itself a "Patriotic Propaganda Bulletin—Regularly Irregular: not subjected to censorship," and each edition cheerily requested that readers "Please kindly circulate this bulletin."[2] Despite its light-hearted and satirical tone, *La Libre Belgique* and other clandestine publications played an immense role in fomenting Belgian resistance against German occupiers and defending the Belgian national identity. Ultimately, the clandestine press fought a propaganda war with

[1] Eugène van Doren, *Les tribulations du "manager" de la Libre Belgique clandestine 1914-1918*, (Brussels: TH Dewarichet, 1947), 42.
[2] *La Libre Belgique*, No. 1, February 1, 1915, Archives Générales du Royaume.

the German Government-General for the hearts and loyalties of the two main cultural nations of Belgium, the Flemish and Walloons, through a grassroots campaign of pro-Belgian rhetoric.[3]

In 1830, the two majority cultural groups of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands broke away to form their own country of Belgium. Large swaths of both nations consented to and embraced the newly created Belgian state and the emerging Belgian nation. However, linguistic and economic differences among Flemings and Walloons inhibited the expansion of the Belgian nation to incorporate all members of the Flemish and Walloon imagined communities. Though the vast majority of Belgian citizens accepted that their civic loyalties were to the Belgian state, their deeply engrained Flemish or Walloon cultural heritage presupposed their cultural loyalties to Belgium. When the Germans invaded Belgium in 1914, they attempted to exploit these divides in national loyalties in a "divide and conquer" approach to facilitate German annexation of Belgium at the end of the war. This strategy, however, would not be as simple as they had planned.

The German invasion provoked an outpouring of nationalistic fervor not for Flemish or Walloon identities, but rather served as a catalyst for the expansion of a pan-Belgian identity. At that moment, Belgians united against the violators of their sovereignty and supported those who defended the Belgian *patrie*. Belgian soldiers and King Albert's resolve to defend the homeland from the invading forces were celebrated by newspapers seeking to promote public support for the war effort. In his speech delivered to the Belgian parliament on the day of the German invasion, King Albert appealed directly to Flemings

[3] "Government-General" was the name for the German agency tasked with administrative affairs in Belgium.

and Walloons alike to defend the country, stating, "Everywhere in Flanders and Wallonia, in the towns and in the countryside, one single feeling binds all hearts together: the sense of patriotism."[4] By appealing to both Flemings' and Walloons' sense of "patriotism," the King hoped to foster a sense of a national Belgian identity—an identity which, in theory, applied to all Belgians. In this sense, "patriotism" referred to Belgians' zeal to the defend the country of Belgium against the violators of Belgian neutrality.

For discussions of nationalism and identity, it is necessary to first outline the framework which shall be used in this thesis. Scholar Benedict Anderson defines nations as "imagined communities," and argues that they arise from a historically shared "religious community" and "dynastic realm."[5] Belgium is a unique country to examine as its creation conjoined three distinct imagined communities, those being the Flemish, Walloon, and Belgian nations. In this way, Belgium is a unique case because only Flanders fits within Anderson's framework, as shall be seen in Chapter One. While Flemings can "project" their nation "into the distant past of the early Middle Ages," the Belgian nation which expanded during the First World War arose in the late 18th century, and the Walloon nation developed chiefly to counter the power of the Flemish nation shortly after the creation of the Belgian state in 1830.[6] As the Germans repeatedly attempted to exploit the national divisions between Flemings and Walloons, Belgian unionists in the clandestine press endeavored to prompt Flemish and Walloon nationalists to re-imagine their community to the Belgian nation.

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[4] Michael Duffy, "Address by King Albert to Belgian Parliament, 4 August 1914," firstworldwar.com, 2009. Accessed March 5, 2018. The term "Flemings" refers to people of Flemish heritage.
[5] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983), 12.
[6] Patrick Geary, *The Myth of Nations* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000), 18.

The distinctive case of Belgium during the First World War complicates Anderson's theories on the necessity of a commonly consumed print vernacular and the necessity of print-capitalism to foster a "national consciousness."[7] Anderson suggested that the rise of printed works in common vernaculars permitted "fellow-readers, to whom they were connected through print, [to form]… the embryo of the nationally imagined community."[8] With the widespread circulation of print materials facilitated by the rise of capitalism, the amalgamation of these two advancements in civilization laid the framework for national identities to develop across Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries.[9] Though widely circulated prints were central to the expansion of the Belgian nation during the First World War, unionist benefactors, not self-interested capitalists, funded prohibited publications to support the Belgian imagined community. As publishers were barred by the Government-General from printing pro-Belgian material, perpetuators of the clandestine press recognized that any attempt to receive payment for each edition of the paper sold would permit the Germans to track the money back to the heads of the operation. Instead, publishers left each transaction up to individuals, and acknowledged that the price for each paper could range from "zero to infinity."[10]

Anderson's premise of a common vernacular being necessary to give rise to an imagined community appears to dismiss the possibility of a multilingual nation such as Belgium. Yet, clandestine publications promoting the Belgian nation appeared in both the

[7] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 37.
[8] Ibid, 44.
[9] Ibid.
[10] This statement was emblazoned at the heading of each edition of *La Libre Belgique*. To lift spirits, the paper then jokingly stated that "vendors are kindly asked not to surpass this limit."

main vernaculars of Belgium, Dutch and French. While each publication differed in language and in rhetoric, almost all incorporated the three pillars of Belgian identity, into their content to varying degrees. These three pillars of identity were loyalty to the Belgian crown, Catholic heritage, and anti-German sentiment. The Belgian state's use of both French and Dutch by the late 19th century permitted all members of Belgian society to participate, despite the fact that some Walloons and Flemings continuing to identify more strongly with France or the Netherlands.

Ernest Renan's conclusions in his 1882 speech to the Sorbonne entitled "What is a Nation?" clearly influenced clandestine publishers and are necessary for a proper discussion of identity in this thesis. Renan ultimately concludes that a nation is a "soul, a spiritual principle," held together through a "great solidarity" among its people.[11] Each nation also satisfies two requirements, "One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present consent, the desire to live together, the desire to continue to invest in the heritage that we have jointly received…"[12] Similar to Anderson, Renan suggests that some form of heritable culture—or in Andersonian terms, a religious community and a dynastic realm—is passed down from the preceding generation. Secondly, each member of the nation agrees to recognize and partake in the expectations and customs of the community. In the case of nation-states, this daily contract obliges the individual to adhere to and obey the laws of the state; this is otherwise known as civic nationalism. However, Germans seeking to split Belgium back into the separate nations of

[11] Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?," text of a conference delivered at the Sorbonne on March 11th, 1882; in Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*, Paris, Presses-Pocket, 1992. (translated by Ethan Rundell).
[12] Ibid.

Flanders and Wallonia attempted to frame national identity as embedded in ethnicity. Instead of appealing to Flemings' civic loyalties, Germans sought to stress the shared Germanic ethnic and linguistic connections between the Flemings and Germans. While the German Government-General tried to sow ethnic discord between Flemings and Walloons in the censored press, the clandestine press embraced Renan's civic nationalism and touted the "Belgian soul," with one paper even adopting the name *L'âme Belge*.[13] Though Renan dismissed the idea that language and religion were contributing factors in the emergence of a nation, the clandestine press had to publish in both Dutch and French to reach all possible members of Belgian nation. The first way in which Catholic heritage acted as a pillar of Belgian identity was due to the pervasive role of the Catholic Church in both Belgian civic and political life. The second reason was that all three national identities had a Catholic tradition spanning back centuries. Within the overarching frameworks of national identity, historians can observe how the three pillars of Belgian identity developed in the underground press.

Unionist publishers in the clandestine press incorporated the pillars of Belgian identity into their writings to usurp Flemish and Walloon cultural and civic loyalties and bolster loyalty to the Belgian nation. Chapter One will discuss the political climate of Belgium before the invasion and the actions taken by the Germans to censor the press upon their arrival. Chapter Two will introduce the clandestine press and analyze articles from various publications to understand how unionist publishers incorporated the three pillars of identity into their writings to invoke Belgian identity. The third chapter will examine articles written about three specific events, the German establishment of a Flemish-

[13] *L'âme Belge* No. 1, November 1915, Archives Générales du Royaume.

speaking university, the establishment of the puppet government of the Council of Flanders, and the creation of Flemish-German organizations to establish connections between the Flemish and the Germans. Accompanied by an active censored press, the German occupational government supported these initiatives through a policy known as *Flamenpolitik*, which tried to fracture Belgians along their prior Flemish and Walloon loyalties.

Recent scholarship has both perpetuated and complicated the notion that Belgium was first and foremost a victim of World War I which remained subdued for the duration of the war. Historians John Horne and Alan Kramer argue that the executions of Belgian civilians *en masse* during their march through Belgium were due to frustration among the German soldiers at their humiliation at the Belgian forts of Liège and Namur, partnered with memories of effective guerilla resistance fighters during the Franco-Prussian War. Soldiers anticipated a similar guerilla resistance from Belgian civilians and justified their brutal response as self-defense, despite the fact that resistance activities were, in reality, largely nonexistent.[14] Stories of these atrocities and *crimes allemands* quickly became a rallying cry for Belgian unionists in their crusade against German authorities.[15]

While Horne and Kramer set out to debunk the narrative that stories of German atrocities were simply Allied propaganda, Sophie De Schaepdrijver and Emmanuel Debruyne highlight the everyday contributions to the war effort made by Belgian civilians

[14] Ibid, 46. For further discussion of "German atrocities" against Belgian civilians, see Jeff Lipkes, *Rehearsals: The German Army in Belgium, 1914* (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2007). Both *German Atrocities* and *Rehearsals* challenge scholarship widely accepted throughout the 20th century, which largely dismissed reports of atrocities against civilians as "Allied propaganda."
[15] *La Libre Belgique* No. 22, Archives Générales du Royaume.

in occupied Belgium. In their jointly published article "*Sursum Corda*: The Underground Press in Occupied Belgium, 1914-1918," they argue that "the self-appointed mission of the underground press was to assert and, by its very existence, enact a sense of national independence."[16] Other scholarship reiterates this assertion, though this argument can be taken a step further. The underground press aided in the expansion of a Belgian identity to both Flemings and Walloons as a defense of the "Belgian soul."

The clandestine press in Belgium was extensive and prolific, with at least seventy-seven separate newspapers publishing at some point during the war, some with a readership that spanned the country.[17] While few of these ran for more than a year or published more than fifty editions due to German countermeasures, insufficient resources, or other extenuating circumstances, the publications—in both French and Dutch—were a thorn in the side of the Germans throughout the occupation. Those who participated in the clandestine press complicate the narrative of Belgium as a helpless victim of the German Army. Their answer to the call of duty to the nation in a time of extreme hardship embodied the ultimate sacrifice a citizen can make to their imagined community: a willingness to risk oneself for the liberation of the nation. By examining how clandestine papers written in both common vernaculars incorporated various facets of Belgian identity, this thesis reveals the process through which two nations were united into one—if only for a fleeting moment.

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[16] Sophie De Schaepdrijver and Emmanuel Debruyne. "*Sursum Corda*: The Underground Press in Occupied Belgium, 1914-1918," *Military Occupations in First World War Europe*, 2013, 24.
[17] Hirsch, *Les Soldats de la Plume*, 158-188.

Chapter One: The Political Backdrop of the Invasion

To properly understand the methods and goals of the underground press, it is necessary to first contextualize Belgian identity within the history of the Belgian state and nation. In 1912, Representative Jules Destrée, a Walloon member of the national Parliament, sent an open letter to King Albert I of Belgium. In the letter, Destrée declared "a grand and horrifying truth: there are no Belgians… Belgium is a political state, artificially created, but it is not a nationality."[18] Though Destrée ascertained that the nations of Flanders and Wallonia were distinctly different, he merely suggested that the regional governments of Wallonia and Flanders should receive more autonomy to avoid issues between national differences in language and culture. If each nation was left to its own devices, he argued, Belgium would be more prosperous and peaceful as neither nation would be able to oppress the other through federal legislation. Though some of the Walloon separatist's complaints discussed by Destrée appear to be illogical, his concerns regarding the oppression of one nation by the other had long been felt by both Flemings and Walloons.[19]

Since the creation of the Belgian state in 1830, the Flemish vied to increase their influence over what they perceived as the Walloon-controlled Belgian government due to the privileged position of French in Belgian society. Despite the fact that roughly sixty

[18] Jules Destrée, "Lettre au Roi sur la séparation de la Wallonie et de la Flandre." (Bruxelles: Edition de la Wallonie Libre, 1963), 6.
[19] Ibid. Among a list of gripes with the Belgian government, Destrée justly discusses the prevention of monolingual Walloons from gaining employment in the federal government as a reason for Walloon unrest. Though it logically follows that a bilingual country should employ people fluent in both languages, Destrée begrudgingly cited widespread "repugnance" felt by Walloons at the prospect of learning Dutch as a reason many Walloons remained monolingual.

percent of the Belgian population spoke Dutch as their native language, Flemish citizens seeking a position at any level of the Belgian national or provincial government before 1840 had to become fluent in French.[20] In the decades before the First World War, a revitalization of Flemish heritage and culture arose to affirm the value of Flemish identity in what they felt was an oppressive, Walloon-dominated country.[21] The development of the Flemish nation occurred alongside other European nations such as France and Germany. Though the Flemish movement arose as an affirmation of the value of Flemish heritage, a small, but extreme, faction longed for an independent Flemish state. While advocates of Flemish and Walloon independence alike were few in numbers, the German Government-General quickly contemplated ways to exploit numerous differences between the two nations for their own benefit in 1914. To overcome the quarrels over whether Belgium was merely a state comprised of two nations or a nation in itself, the clandestine press reached deep into the historical record to establish the historical supremacy of a Belgian identity.

"Horum omnium fortissimi sunt Belgae"[22]

In his 1920 work *A Short History of Belgium*, Belgian historian Leon van der Essen places the first iterance of a Belgian people with the Roman Emperor Julius Caesar in 57 B.C. Caesar reportedly referred to the "Belgae" peoples as being "the bravest among all

[20] Witte et al, 57.
[21] Clough, *The Flemish Movement in Belgium*, 111.
[22] Translation: "Among all the Gauls, the bravest are the Belgians." Léon van der Essen, *A Short History of Belgium*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1920), 8.

the Gauls."[23] In an effort to foster a sense of common identity, promoters of a pan-Belgian identity in the underground press attempted to establish the origins of a distinctly Belgian heritage before the rise of Flemish or Walloon identities. In so doing, the goal of these authors was to establish the historical preeminence of Belgian identity. They implied that "Belgianness" had as much historical foundation and legitimacy as the Franks or Germanic peoples; groups which ultimately developed into the powerful French and German nations. In an article published in *La Libre Belgique* from January 1918, the same quote from Caesar is included to emphasize the continuing resolve of the Belgians, stating: "*Fortissimi sunt Belgae*: we are strong."[24] This statement not only encouraged Belgians to remain steadfast in their long wait for liberation, but it also appealed to their sense of duty to the Belgian nation.

Aside from its historical roots as a subset of the Gauls as "Belgae," notions of a distinctly Belgian community did not become widespread until the Brabançonne Revolution in 1789. In 1781, Austrian emperor Joseph II, who controlled the territory of what is today Belgium, began referring to the Southern portion of the Netherlands as "Belgium."[25] At the onset of the Brabançonne Revolution, what started out as a revolution in the province of Brabant spread to ultimately create the short-lived country called the

[23] Léon van der Essen, *A Short History of Belgium*, 8. See also: Jean Stengers, *Les Racines de La Belgique: Jusqu'à La Révolution de 1830* (Bruxelles, Racine, 2000), 16.
[24] *La Libre Belgique* No. 141, January 1918, Archives Générales du Royaume. The article itself is titled "Fortissimi sunt Belgae: nous sommes forts."
[25] Jean Stengers, *Histoire Du Sentiment National En Belgique Des Origines à 1918: Les Racines de La Belgique Jusqu'à La Révolution de 1830* (Bruxelles: Éditions Racine, 2000), 121. See also: J.C.H. Blom and E. Lamberts, *History of the Low Countries*, 285-289.

United Belgian States.[26] These United Belgian States mimicked the United States of America under the Articles of Confederation; a weak central government in Brussels oversaw eight largely autonomous provinces, the territory of which comprised much of what would later become the Kingdom of Belgium (save for the independent principality of Liège).[27] Echoing the republican and nationalistic ideals of both American and French revolutionaries, the Brabançonne Revolution laid the foundation for the successful Belgian Revolution of 1830, which also coincided with the July revolution in France. While it would be another forty years until Belgians formed a lasting union, Belgian historian Jean Stengers asserts that the Brabançonne Revolution was "the moment when an undeniable Belgian nationality appeared for the first time, founded on a sentiment of national identity."[28]

Though Flanders and Wallonia momentarily came together under a single flag in 1789, they still had not crossed the "linguistic frontier." The linguistic frontier marks the division between the Dutch speaking Flemish region to the north and the French speaking Walloon region to the south. While there has been debate over how exactly the line arose, historian Shepard Clough suggests that it formed around 400 A.D. and stretched "from Maestricht… to the south of Brussels and Lille, and reach[ed] the North Sea near Boulogne."[29] Despite centuries of change in the tongue of the governing empire, this linguistic barrier continued to separate Flemings from Walloons. With the creation of the

[26] H. C. N., van der Noot, "Manifeste Des Brabançons," October 24, 1789, Melvin Belg, 340-405, Box C, Kenneth Spencer Research Library. See also: Jean Stengers, *Les Racines de La Belgique*, 121-151.
[27] J.C.H. Blom and E. Lamberts, *History of the Low Countries*, 285-289.
[28] Jean Stengers, *Les Racines de La Belgique*, 151.
[29] Shepard B. Clough, *A History of the Flemish Movement in Belgium: A Study in Nationalism* (New York: Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1930), 4.

Kingdom of Belgium in 1830, the linguistic dividing line was cemented when it became the border which separated the jurisdictions of the Flemish and Walloon regional governments. Due to this linguistic divide, the Flemish and Walloon nations had developed largely independent of each other, despite often remaining under the control of the same imperial European power. To overcome the vernacular difference of the two nations, the clandestine press strived to convince their linguistic compatriots that their nationalistic duty was to support the Belgian nation, not Flanders or Wallonia. One Flemish clandestine publication, *De Vlaamsche Leeuw*, regularly condemned the Flemish *activists* who collaborated with the Germans as traitors to the *vaderland*. To understand how the Dutch and French speaking clandestine presses appealed to their respective readers to support the Belgian cause, it is first necessary to describe the aspects of Flemish and Walloon history and culture to which unionist writers appealed to convert readers to the Belgian identity.

The Lion and the Rooster

The County of Flanders emerged as a regional power during the medieval era and by 1300, the Flemish had united under a single Flemish banner. In the 1302 Battle of the Golden Spurs, the armed Flemish peasantry managed to defeat the professional army of France in a battle that signaled the arrival of the County of Flanders on the regional stage.[30] At that time, the battle signaled the security of the Flemish territory under *De Vlaamsche Leeuw* (the Lion of Flanders), but this autonomy was not to last. In the following centuries, Flanders came under the control of the House of Burgundy (1385-1477), the Hapsburgs (1477-1588), and continued to exchange hands intermittently between the Spanish, French,

[30] J.C.H. Blom and E. Lamberts, *History of the Low Countries*, 62-63.

Dutch, and Holy Roman Empires until the Austrian Empire established control from 1713-1789.[31] Accompanied by a deep connection to the Catholic clergy, Flanders was a textbook example of a nation which satisfied Anderson's requirements of the religious community and dynastic realm.

Unlike Flanders, historiographical information on the development of the Walloon nation has received considerably less scholarly attention. Even scholars of Walloon history admit that the field was largely neglected until the 1973 work *Histoire de la Wallonie*. Within this comprehensive history of the territory and its inhabitants, the authors describe how the territory of Wallonia was often divided among different kingdoms and principalities (see Figures 1 and 2). Walloon historians André Joris and Jean-Louis Kupper state that "no city [in Wallonia] constituted a sufficient administrative or cultural hub to maintain the cohesion of the region in its orbit" at the end of the Medieval era, and consequently hindered the development of a common Walloon heritage in subsequent centuries.[32]

[31] Ibid, 82, 111, 245.
[32] André Joris and Jean-Louis Kupper, "Villes, bourgs et franchises en Wallonie de 1250 à 1477," in *La Wallonie: Le pays et les hommes*, 157-158.

Figure 1: The territories of the low countries under Charles V in the first half of the 16th Century.[33]

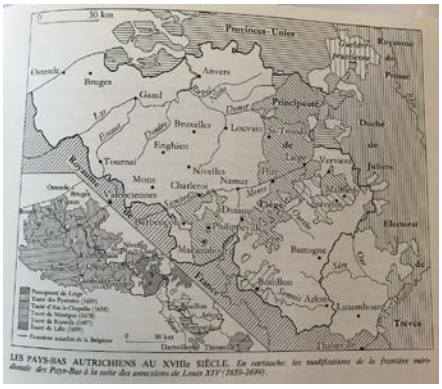

Figure 2: The Austrian Netherlands in the 18th Century.[34]

The lack of a single sovereign ruling over all Walloon territory hindered the development of a cohesive Walloon national identity. Until Wallonia came under the rule of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1815, many Walloons had difficulty distinguishing themselves as a separate nation from the French. It was not until Walloon interests clashed with those of the Flemish with the creation of Belgium in 1830 that the

[33] André Uyttebrouck, "Une confederation et trois principautés," in *La Wallonie: Le pays et les hommes*, ed. Hervé Hasquin (Brussels : La Renaissance du Livre, 1975), 214.
[34] Ibid, 223.

notion of a Walloon identity began to spread. This development was partially due to Walloon economic and linguistic self-interest, but was also in part to diametrically oppose the already established Flemish nation in the political sphere.[35] While some Walloons attempted to foster a Walloon identity after 1830 to oppose what they perceived as Flemish attempts to privilege Flemish culture and language in Belgian society, Walloons writ large consented to be a part of the new nation of Belgium. Given that French was the official governing language of the Belgium in 1830 and that Wallonia was the more economically dominant than Flanders at the time, Walloons embraced the newly created country and its monarch. With the ascension of King Leopold I to the throne, Walloons finally identified with a single monarch and established "dynastic realm."

In this way, Walloons were more willing and able to consent to be part of the Belgian nation than Flemings. Whereas Flemish nationalists in the late 19th century appealed to the Flemish dynastic realm and religious community of Catholicism, the first King of the dynastic realm of Walloons was also the first King of Belgium. Clandestine publishers in the French language understood that appeals to Catholic identity would garner support for the Belgian nation among Walloons because Walloons associated Catholic identity with the Belgian nation. However, Belgian nationalists publishing in Dutch comprehended the dual role of Catholic identity as part of both the Flemish and Belgian nation. As publishers wanted Flemings to consent to the Belgian nation, underground papers feared that overemphasizing Catholicism might unintentionally appeal to readers'

[35] Léopold Genicot, "Introduction," in *Histoire de la Wallonie*, Edouard Privat, ed., (Toulouse: Univers de la France et des pays francophones, 1973), 8.

Flemish, rather than Belgian, heritage.[36] Consequently, Belgian nationalists opted for subtle reminders of Catholic identity in their publications. In the case of *De Vlaamsche Leeuw* and *De Vlaamsche Wachter* (the Guardian of Flanders), this manifested as a quote from the celebrated Belgian Cardinal Joseph Mercier as part of its banner.[37] To avoid unintended consequences, those publishing in Dutch primarily ran articles building on anti-German sentiments or calling for loyalty to the Belgian crown.

"L'union fait la force"

The Belgian Revolution of 1830 occurred during a time of societal upheaval and nationalistic awakening in Europe. As countries began to industrialize and adopt more republican ideals, people in the Southern Netherlands did not feel as though they were truly a part of Dutch society. Though modern Belgian historians such as Els Witte emphasize economic factors as the primary cause of the revolution, Jules Destrée and Walloon nationalists held a different perspective. Destrée states that Flemings and Walloons had different reasons for revolting: For the Flemish, the primary factor was the opportunity for the overwhelmingly Catholic region of Flanders to gain power, while Walloons participated to eliminate Dutch as the primary language in a primarily Francophone region. Though there is scholarly disagreement over the degree to which various causes triggered the revolution, both Flemings and Walloons clearly felt ostracized from the power

[36] "Katholiek Activistisch Verweerschrift," *De Vlaamsche Leeuw* No. 24, March 1918, Archives Générales du Royaume. In this article, the author tries to invoke Catholic principles as justification to defend the Belgian identity against Flemings attempting to commandeer Catholicism as part of Flemish identity.
[37] *De Vlaamsche Leeuw* No. 3, Archives Générales du Royaume; *De Vlaamsche Wachter* No. 7, Archives Générales du Royaume.

structures within Dutch society to the point of open revolt.[38] How is it that these two independent, drastically different nations came to be united under a single government?

It appears that Jules Destrée's claim that Flanders and Wallonia worked in tandem to separate from the Dutch certainly played a role, but with their own unique agendas. Most Flemings envisioned a state in which Catholicism was the dominant religion, whereas Walloons desired a state in which French was not the primary vernacular of the governing structures. After achieving their common objective, the status of French as the language of the aristocracy and government in Flanders satisfied Walloon interests, and eased their concerns about the linguistic disparity. The Flemish were also content with the arrangement, as Walloons' Catholic heritage did not threaten their way of life. Though what ensured the longevity of a Belgian state was not domestic politics, but the continued role of the territory comprising Belgium as a pawn on the international stage.

With the Belgian separation from the Netherlands, the French and British seized the opportunity to advance their own interests in the region. The French, who were still grappling with the fallout from the Napoleonic Wars and their own July Revolution of 1830, initially supported the Belgian Revolution to undermine the Netherlands and to potentially reclaim a portion of Wallonia, which they had lost in 1814. The British, on the other hand, envisioned the creation of a small buffer state between the great powers on the mainland. More specifically, they hoped to keep their historical antagonists, the French and Dutch, from a renewed power struggle. The British hoped that a small, neutral state would prevent further wars among the regional powers and bring stability to the continent.[39] With

[38] Witte et. al, *Political History of Belgium*, 56-57.
[39] Ibid, 24.

the Treaty of London of 1839, signatories not only recognized Belgium as an independent state, but also guaranteed its neutrality. Ultimately, this treaty brought Britain and France to Belgium's aid when Germany violated its neutrality in 1914.

Through the establishment of the Belgian state, Flanders and Wallonia became united under a single governing body, and the newly crowned King Leopold I sought to maintain that union. The creation of a single Belgian national identity would prove to be a significant challenge. During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the region of Flanders was comprised largely of rural Dutch-speaking farmers and overseen by a French-speaking aristocracy.[40] It is due in large part to this phenomenon that French became the dominant language of state affairs, as governing aristocrats preferred French to what they considered to be the less sophisticated tongue of Dutch. This disparity between the official language of the governing aristocrats and the vernacular of the governed citizenry gave rise to the significant linguistic disagreements in the years before World War One. It was against this political backdrop that the Germans invaded on August 4, 1914.

The Presses Fall Silent

When the German Army entered Brussels on August 20, German officials immediately demanded that the local newspapers subject themselves to German censorship or cease publishing. In a show of solidarity for their Belgian comrades, "not a single paper accepted the censorship," and newspaper circulation in the city ground to a halt—momentarily.[41] Shortly thereafter, a black market for papers from unoccupied Belgium and

[40] Ibid, 56.
[41] Massart, *La Presse Clandestine*, 1.

abroad arose to fill the void. Almost immediately after the bulk of the German army marched on from Brussels, Belgian civilians began smuggling uncensored dailies from unoccupied cities such as Antwerp and Ghent into Brussels. Writing in 1917, Jean Massart, a professor of botany at the Royal Academy of Belgium before the war, described the establishment of a clandestine distribution scheme and the transportation process for these uncensored dailies:

> Clandestine commerce occurred regularly, and at 9:00 p.m. in Brussels we read *La Flandre libérale*, which was sold the same morning in Ghent. The first copies sent by the press were brought in automobiles right next to the German outposts in Ninove, de Lennick, or de Hal, about fifteen kilometers outside of Brussels. There, the parcels were buried in baskets of vegetables and transported into the city. They were then unpacked in the back room of a cabaret, which changed daily…The [salesmen] posted in the main streets and intersections sold ostensibly illustrated maps, patriotic badges or censured newspapers. Under their breath, they whispered '*La Flandre*?—How much?'[42]

Similar distribution structures would continue to be utilized throughout the war by the underground press to circulate uncensored materials throughout the country, as distributors for *La Libre Belgique* had discovered by 1915.[43]

With no officially sanctioned newspapers publishing, the occupying government, headed by Governor-General von der Goltz, began publishing *Le Bruxellois* and *La Belgique* in September and November of 1914, respectively.[44] According to historians

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[42] Quoted in Ibid, 2.

[43] For more information on the distribution methods of the clandestine press, see van Doren, *Les Tribulations du "Manager"*; Goemaere, *Histoire de la Libre Belgique Clandestine*; and Massart, *La Presse Clandestine dans la Belgique occupée*. Comically, one article in *La Libre Belgique* apologizes to its readers for the fishy smell of some copies, as they had to travel within a crate of freshly caught fish. They then promise that come spring, they will be sure to package them within a crate of roses.

[44] "Le Bruxellois No. 3," *Le Bruxellois*, September 22, 1914, Hetarchief.be, accessed March 4, 2018; "La Belgique No. 1," *La Belgique*, November 5, 1914, Hetarchief.be, accessed March 4, 2018.

Sophie De Schaepdrijver and Emmanuel Debruyne, these censored dailies provided "local news, commercial and personal ads, recipes and letters to the editor" in order to "re-establish a sense of normalcy" for Belgian civilians.[45] In essence, the German Government-General hoped that circulating dailies, even German-sponsored ones, would lull the Belgian people into a sense of complacency for what was expected to be no more than a few months of occupation. Upon taking the reins of government in Belgium, the German Government-General enacted censorship laws regulating all "printed products… textual and photographic reproductions and musical compositions with lyrics or commentaries."[46] The main arms of the *Pressestelle*, *Le Bruxellois* and *La Belgique*, maintained that they were Belgian newspapers, despite the fact that each included the address of its publishing office in Brussels.[47] As only approved newspapers would be officially permitted to operate in the city, citizens could easily distinguish between censored and uncensored documents. Nonetheless, the censored press attempted to maintain its façade of Belgian loyalty. The manifesto in the first edition of *La Belgique* attempted to undermine the legitimacy of foreign journals smuggled into the country while establishing its own legitimacy as an organization interested in educating the population, stating:

> We have seen a lack of intellectual nourishment develop firstly with the ever-increasing cost of foreign newspapers, then the launching of supposed extracts from

[45] Sophie De Schaepdrijver and Emmanuel Debruyne. "Sursum Corda: The Underground Press in Occupied Belgium, 1914-1918," *Military Occupations in First World War Europe*, 2013, 25. See also: Emmanuel Debruyne. "Véridiques, antiprussiens et patriotes." Les journaux prohibés en pays occupé. 1914-1918," *La résistance en France et en Belgique occupées, 1914-1918*, 2012, 78-79.
[46] Henri Pirenne, *La Belgique et la Guerre Mondiale* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1928), 77-78.
[47] "Le Bruxellois No. 3," *Le Bruxellois*. September 22, 1914, HetArcheif.be, accessed March 5, 2018.

> these journals—extracts which are seriously flawed and always, or almost, invented at all stages—and finally the fraudulent printing and the high sale price of so-called French journals, full of news as sensational as it is imaginary. The only fact that such a maneuver—we know that the police are actively searching for the authors—could have received, sufficiently demonstrates how happy the public would be to be able to take interest in a new regular, dignified and trusted publication, and it is in consideration of that state of hopeful spirit that a group of journalists have undertaken, despite the difficult circumstances, the writing of the system which today presents itself to its patrons. We have daringly baptized *La Belgique.*[48]

By framing their mission as one of good faith, *La Belgique* hoped that they would be able to convince unsuspecting readers of its supposed legitimacy. The authors further attempted to convince readers that their mission was "daring" and in the interest of the Belgians by implying that their paper arose simply from the desire to fill the "intellectual" void left by other papers, rather than the fact that it was commissioned by the Germans. While it did experience a fairly broad readership, Sophie De Schaepdrijver suggests that its consumption was due primarily to the extremely limited availability of alternative newspapers and high prices for foreign papers on the black market.[49]

Initially, von der Goltz merely intended for the papers to reassure Belgians that the Germans were well on their way to a swift defeat of France. In light of this, the papers implied that the occupation of Belgium would be short-lived as long as Belgians refrained from obstructing German military operations for a few months. Rather than outright prohibiting the publishing of existing Belgian-run newspapers, the occupational regime first attempted to reach an agreement with newspaper editors over censorship, assuring

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[48] Ibid.

[49] Sophie de Shaepdrijver, "Occupation, Propaganda, and the Idea of Belgium," in *European Culture in the Great War*, ed. A. Roshwald and R. Stites (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 271.

them that it would be a "very broadminded censorship."[50] von der Goltz claimed that he did not "ask anyone to renounce their patriotic sentiments," but that he did expect "reasonable obedience" from all Belgians.[51] Indeed, *Le Bruxellois* actively attempted to publish articles which, for the most part, avoided overtly supporting the German regime. Despite the widespread availability and convenience of censored newspapers, Belgians yearned for sources of news which had not been subjected to German censorship. With only newspapers sanctioned by the occupying German government widely available, Belgians looked for alternative sources of more trustworthy information. By the early months of 1915, Belgian unionists grew worried that German propaganda would cause Belgians to simply accept the new reality of occupation. In defiance of Germany and in support of the Belgian nation, some Belgian nationalists began publishing and circulating their own uncensored newspapers to provide fellow citizens with a nationalistic and more trustworthy alternative to German prints.

[50] Millard, *Uncensored: The True Story of the Clandestine Newspaper "La Libre Belgique,"* 20.
[51] Henri Pirenne. *La Belgique et la guerre mondiale* (New Haven, U.S.A: Yale University Press, 1928), 93, 207.

Chapter Two: Belgians Take to the Presses

The Atlas of Belgian Identity

On the morning of August 20, 1914, subscribers to the Catholic-leaning *Le Patriot* awoke to find their morning delivery of the daily paper. This was the last time its presses would run for months. Later that day, the German army marched into Brussels and demanded that the Belgian press subject itself to German censorship. As with all other newspapers and publishers who operated in Brussels before the invasion, Victor Jourdain, publisher of *Le Patriot*, decided to shut down his presses in protest.[52] However, within months of its presses going silent, Jourdain partnered with his son-in-law, Eugène van Doren, to begin the most well-known and celebrated underground newspaper of the war.

By the end of 1914, multiple prohibited publications had cropped up across Belgium, and newspapers printed in France and Britain continued to fetch high prices on the black market due to the demand for uncensored information.[53] Uncensored papers often featured information on the progress of the war which contradicted German papers, as both sides favored reports on their military successes rather than failures. Many underground papers, such as *Les dernières nouvelles* and *Revue hebdomadaire de la presse Française* (*Revue de la presse*), were compilations of articles from allied presses which were consolidated into a single document to provide Belgians with updates about the war.

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[52] Millard, Oscar E. *Uncensored: The True Story of the Clandestine Newspaper "La Libre Belgique" Published in Brussels During the German Occupation* (London: Robert Hale and Company, 1937) 19-20; Christian Laporte. "Du 'Patriote' à 'La Libre Belgique'..." *La Libre*, August 1, 2014.

[53] Notably, the first clandestine periodical to emerge was La Vedette in the northeastern town of Hasselt, which was first published on August 8, 1914. De Schaepdrijver and Debruyne, "Sursum Corda: The Underground Press in Occupied Belgium, 1914-1918," 25.

Throughout 1914, the scope of prohibited journals was largely contained to news and events from the front. Once it became clear that the war would not be "over by Christmas" and the Germans would be in the country indefinitely, Jourdain and van Doren took action to prevent fellow Belgians from accepting the German occupation. After the German Governor-General banned the pastoral letter of Belgian Cardinal Joseph Désiré Mercier entitled *Patience et endurance*, Jourdain and van Doren ensured that the Cardinal's message spread far and wide. In January 1915, the men utilized their publishing experience and their printing press to clandestinely publish and circulate the pro-Belgian pamphlet.[54]

Jourdain and van Doren were fervently pro-Belgian in their Catholic devotion and loyalty to the Crown. Before the war, Jourdain had "championed the cause of pacifism," a result of his devoutly Catholic worldview.[55] Rather than call for outright violence against the Germans, they chose instead to nonviolently undermine German objectives through the clandestine press. In so doing, they often voiced support for the Belgian *Patrie* and for the royal family.[56] When alluding to the "*Patrie*," or "*vaderland*" in Dutch, unionist publishers wanted to invoke a sense of obligation to fellow Belgians to defend the land Belgians had occupied since the late 18th century. Upon hearing of the horrors committed against Belgian civilians on their march through the country, Jourdain and van Doren both developed a deep hatred for the German occupiers. This staunch identification with the Belgian nation, accompanied by their experience in the press, led the men to launch one of the most

[54] Millard, *Uncensored*, 22; see also: van Doren, *Les tribulations*, 21.
[55] Millard, *Uncensored*, 20.
[56] They particularly celebrated King Albert, due to his resolve to remain at the Western Front defending the last section of Belgian land.

influential and widely-circulated clandestine newspapers of the war entitled *La Libre Belgique*.

As the name suggests, the paper was a rebuke of *La Belgique*. While *La Belgique* attempted to maintain a façade of neutrality, *La Libre Belgique* touted itself as "free of censorship."[57] The first edition of the paper laid out the editors' pro-Belgian manifesto, stating that,

> [*La Libre Belgique*'s] only goal is to reaffirm and to encourage Belgian patriotism until that unknown, though certain, time of deliverance of our generous and glorious little country, the victim of German treason… *La Libre Belgique* will not resemble those papers which publish and scream with the blessing, protection and encouragement of the Germans, and who help them to dampen and discourage our patriotism. No, *La Libre Belgique* will live underground and spread like Catholicism in the catacombs… *La Libre Belgique* will be royalist because it respects the authority established and has no desire to change a system of government which has provided more than 80 years of prosperity, harmony and has finished in these last heroic days that we now navigate, for it is deserving of its glory.[58]

From the founding of the journal, Jourdain and van Doren laid out the tools and process through which the clandestine press would attempt to expand the Belgian identity across the country. By citing their Catholic heritage, disdain for Germans and the massacres they carried out against Belgian civilians, and declaring their loyalty to the Crown and *Patrie*, *La Libre Belgique* inspired other Belgian nationalists—in Flanders and Wallonia alike—to take up the cause of Belgian resistance throughout the country.

When Belgians opened the seventh edition of *La Libre Belgique* in mid-March of 1915, they were met with a familiar phrase that sought to tug on the nationalistic heartstrings of all Belgian citizens: "L'union fait la force" (Unity makes strength). Since the Revolution of 1830, this national motto had acted as a rallying cry for unionists who

[57] *La Libre Belgiqu*e No. 1, February 1, 1915, Archives Générales du Royaume.
[58] Ibid.

sought peace and tolerance among the Flemish and Walloons. By 1915, Victor Jourdain knew that both Flemings and Walloons would immediately recognize the phrase and its connotations of unity. Capitalizing on this, he described Belgium's motto as having become "the motto of the Allies" in their united fight against the Germans.[59] Belgium was not only depicted as an inspiration to the Allies, but the Allies also assisted the Belgians. *La Libre Belgique* informed readers that the Allies were steadfast in their resolve to defeat the Germans and liberate their nation, as Allied armies were

> Fighting with our noble King Albert to topple the pan-German colossus which dreams of imposing upon Europe its barbaric and ferocious 'Kultur' which has ravaged our country and slaughtered our harmless citizens from Luxembourg, Liège, Namur and Brabant.[60]

Jourdain, along with other authors in the clandestine press, recognized that in order to disseminate the pillars of Belgian identity they would need to include substantial discussions of themes and identities common to both Flemings and Walloons. Even early editions of prohibited journals in 1915 outlined the framework for the expansion of a Belgian national identity. Articles such as "L'union fait la force" were a prime template, as they hit upon multiple facets of these pillars of identity simultaneously.

The Pen of the Pope

Given Jourdain's deep Catholic spirituality, appeals to Catholic identity appeared in every edition of the paper. In fact, Jourdain's many connections with Catholic clergymen even acted as the foundation of the paper's distribution structure enabled its endurance.

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[59] *La Libre Belgique* No. 7, March, 1915, Archives Générales du Royaume.
[60] Ibid. These regions (Luxembourg and Brabant) and cities (Liège and Namur) bore the brunt of the German invasion, as they are situated along Belgium's eastern border with Germany. Brussels is located in the region of Brabant.

The Abbé (Vincent) de Moor agreed to assist the paper from its inception and acted as an integral part in setting up the distribution structure which would serve for years to come. The Abbé was connected to numerous forms of nonviolent resistance. He assisted in the distribution of clandestine publications, cared for and hid French and British soldiers who were trapped behind the front lines, and assisted in the smuggling of letters between soldiers at the front and their families with the *Mot du Soldat* organization.[61]

The assistance of Catholic clergymen in the creation of a distribution structure for the paper was invaluable to the paper's success and longevity. Upon release of the first issue, many of the people who received a copy of *La Libre Belgique* obtained it through their connections with de Moor. Along with de Moor, a Jesuit priest known as Father Paquet was integral in circulating the paper among sympathetic organizations in Belgium. Through his various connections to networks of charity organizers, Paquet was able to expand the reach of the paper beyond the parishioners of the Abbé de Moor. Father Paquet, searching for assistance with his distribution routes, initially recruited fellow priests from the Saint-Michel high school in Brussels.[62] As they printed more copies of each edition, their distribution spread to include numerous Catholic priests and abbots throughout Belgium, but particularly in Brussels.[63] Yet clergymen did not only serve as part of the production of the paper. One Catholic official was revered by Belgians from all backgrounds and became a leading figure of the resistance movement: Cardinal Désiré-Joseph Mercier.

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[61] Millard, *Uncensored: The True Story of the Clandestine Newspaper "La Libre Belgique,"* 23-24.
[62] Eugène van Doren, Les Tribulations du "Manager," 37.
[63] For more information on the distribution methods of the clandestine press, see note 12.

As the Cardinal of Mechelen, Cardinal Mercier felt compelled to provide hope and assistance to the people of Belgium who were suffering under German rule. In his pastoral letter entitled *Patience et Endurance*, he encouraged Belgians to hold on to their Belgian identity and await the inevitable day of liberation from under the German yoke. In what was seen as an open rebuke of German authority by a powerful and morally righteous leader, Cardinal Mercier became a symbol for nonviolent resistors and Belgian unionists. Not only did Mercier represent the moral authority of the Catholic Church, but he also embodied the Belgian nation. Charlotte Kellogg, an American in Belgium in 1916 as part of the Committee for Relief in Belgium, observed that "with the King and the Government gone, [Belgians] recognized, from the outset, in Cardinal Mercier the incarnation of the national spirit."[64] This reverence was evident in pieces published by the underground press. Mercier's writings were so significant to Jourdain and the members of *La Libre Belgique* that each of their editions featured the same quotation from *Patience and Endurance* in the heading, which read:

> Towards the persons dominating our country by military force we should pay such regard as is demanded by the public interest. Let us respect the regulations that they impose on us, so far as these do not infringe upon the liberty of our Christian conscience, or on our 'Patriotic Dignity.'[65]

Though the excerpt appears to imply that complicity and cooperation with the Germans is the preferred way to interact, the latter portion gives broad justification for Belgians to resist German instructions on moral or patriotic grounds. For members of *La Libre Belgique*, the inclusion of the quotation in each edition provided justification to readers of

[64] Charlotte Kellogg, Mercier: The Fighting Cardinal of Belgium (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1920), 131-132.
[65] *La Libre Belgique* No. 1, February 1, 1915, Archives Générales du Royaume.

the methods through which they were defending their Catholic conscience and promoting Belgian identity.

Despite its calls for Flemings and Walloons to unite for the Belgian nation, *La Libre Belgique* was restricted to the portion of the Belgian population who were able to read French. To compensate for the language limitations of prohibited journals in French, others written in Dutch arose to reach Belgians who were restricted to the Flemish vernacular. Fortunately for Flemings in the vicinity of Antwerp, a Flemish counterpart to *La Libre Belgique*, *De Vrije Stem*, circulated twice monthly with comparable wit and patriotic fervor.[66] Similar to the inclusion of Cardinal Mercier's excerpt at the heading of each edition of *Libre Belgique*, *De Vrije Stem* featured its slogan at the top of each issue which declared that it was "Not Flemish, not Walloon, but Belgian!"[67] This cry for unity in the Flemish vernacular sought to appeal to Flemings who may have otherwise succumbed to the temptations of German and Flemish separatist propaganda which advocated for a more autonomous or even an independent Flanders.

Though Flemish papers primarily utilized anti-German sentiment and loyalty to the Belgian crown to convince Flemish readers, their inclusion of quotes from Cardinal Mercier subtly reminded them of their duty as Catholics and as Belgians to oppose German attempts to split the Belgian nation into Flanders and Wallonia. Nearly all clandestine publications appealed to Belgians' common religious heritage of Catholicism and condemned the Germans for their Lutheran beliefs. This difference of religious belief

[66] Joseph Buerbaum. *De Vrije Stem* No. 86, Archives Générales du Royaume.
Amusingly, *De Vrije Stem* and *La Libre Belgique* both provided as their telegraph address the headquarters of their respective local German administrators.
[67] Ibid.

reinforced the sense of "otherness" Belgians were meant to feel toward the Germans, as papers in French and Dutch alike touted quotations from the beloved Cardinal Mercier. Similar to *La Libre Belgique, De Vlaamsche Wachter* also included an extract from Mercier's 1914 work *Patience and Endurance*, and both works regularly praised Mercier and his message.

The front-page article of the 79th edition of *La Libre Belgique*, entitled "Render unto Caesar…," compared the struggles of the Belgians under the occupation of the Germans to the struggle of the Christians in Rome under Caesar. Written by Victor Jourdain himself, the article tells readers:

> Here is what the *boches* always want us to understand: Christ ordained to the Jews to submit themselves to the Roman domination; the Belgian clergy must then preach to their followers submission to [Kaiser] Willhelm and to his representative von Bissing.[68]

To counter attempts to subdue the Belgian people, Jourdain once again invokes Mercier's writings in *Patience and Endurance* in an appeal not only to the illegitimacy of the German government, but also to the Catholic tradition that the Belgian Cardinal represents. Jourdain affirms Mercier's position that Belgians should obey German regulations provided that "they do not infringe upon our Christian consciousness nor our patriotic honor."[69] So central to the ideology of *La Libre Belgique* was this excerpt from Mercier, already emblazoned at the top of each edition, that it merited further extrapolation and discussion within its own article. Though it would have been relatively easy to adopt an "eye for an eye" stance against the Germans in retaliation of their "atrocities" committed during the

[68] *La Libre Belgique* No. 79, June 1916, Archives Générales du Royaume.
[69] Ibid.

initial invasion, Jordain's Catholic beliefs led to his staunch support of nonviolent resistance.[70]

In Defense of the Crown

Throughout the duration of the clandestine press, authors regularly praised the figures which clearly embodied Belgian identity, chief among them being the members of the royal family. *L'âme Belge*, *La Libre Belgique*, and *De Vlaamsche Leeuw* all featured a photograph of King Albert on the front page of an edition, and articles entitled "To Our Queen" or "Long Live the King" appeared frequently throughout the war.[71] In the November 1915 edition of *L'âme Belge*, six out of the fourteen articles described the exploits of King Albert on the Western front or praised the Queen as a "flower of hope," while seven other articles featured homages to Belgium or poems which described the role of the country in combatting the Germans.[72] These subjects aligned well with the *L'âme Belge*'s founding declaration, which described its desire to "give [readers] a taste" of the "beauties and the charms of this soul, the Belgian soul, that the centuries molded of loyalty and heroism, and which must pass uninterrupted and immortal to future generations."[73] This "Belgian soul" was likely an allusion to Ernest Renan's description of a nation and was intended to entice would-be collaborators to re-imagine their community to the nation of Belgium.

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[70] Millard, *Uncensored*, 19-20.
[71] "Sa majesté Albert Ier, Roi des Belges," *L'âme Belge* No. 2, November 1915; "À notre reine," *La Libre Belgique* No. 36, July 1915; "Vive le roi!" *La Libre Belgique* No. 99, November 1916; *De Vlaamsche Leeuw* No. 5, April 1916.
[72] *L'âme Belge* No. 2, November 1915, 18-32.
[73] *L'âme Belge* No. 1, November 1915, 1-16.

In an article entitled "À notre roi," authors of *L'âme Belge* declared that King Albert was "the Belgian soul, the pinnacle of honor and loyalty!" and described the Belgian soul as "immortal."[74] In describing the King as the embodiment of the Belgian soul, readers were meant to project their affection and positive perception of King Albert to the Belgian nation as well. By then declaring this nation immortal, readers were intended to feel a sense of connectedness and obligation to Belgians past, present, and future. This connectedness would thus compel readers to remain loyal to the Belgian soul until the day German forces were driven from the *patrie*. Much like his father, Prince Leopold III was celebrated for his unwavering service to Belgium. In April 1915, he enlisted as a soldier in the Belgian Army at the age of fourteen, despite the fact that the official minimum age of enlistment was sixteen.[75] King Albert and Prince Leopold's actions and status provided the underground press with an abundance of propaganda-worthy material.

Since ascending to the throne in 1909, Albert facilitated discussions between the Flemings and Walloons before the war over the role of language in Belgian society. After his appeal for unity among Belgians on the day of the German invasion, Albert retreated alongside the remaining Belgian army until the First Battle of the Marne halted the German advance in early September 1914. With the Western Front set, the only Belgian territory still under Belgian control was between the French border and a line roughly from the towns of Ypres to Nieuport, a distance of approximately twenty miles. Albert remained with Belgian troops, a decision for which unionist publishers celebrated his "patriotism." *La Libre Belgique* even went so far as to describe how one of their contributing writers

[74] *L'âme Belge*, No. 2, November 1915, Archives Générales du Royaume.
[75] *La Libre Belgique* No. 14, April 1915, Archives Générales du Royaume.

once told Albert that he was "the only King in the world whose subjects… love and admire [him] with their entire soul."[76]


NUMÉRO GRATUIT

LA LIBRE BELGIQUE

HOMMAGE A NOS SOUVERAINS

La Libre Belgique pays homage to the members of the Belgian royal family in a May 1916 issue.


DE VLAAMSCHE LEEUW

Vaderlandsch propagandablad

AAN ONZE VORSTEN

De Vlaamsche Leeuw celebrates King Albert and Queen Elizabeth in April 1916.

[76] *La Libre Belgique* No. 52, November 1915, Archives Générales du Royaume.

"La violation de la neutralité"

When the Germans marched into Brussels in August 1914, the mayor of Brussels, Adolphe Max, made it abundantly clear that he would never cooperate with the Germans. His nonviolent protest resulted in his imprisonment and subsequent deportation to a German labor camp, yet his actions provided unionists with a model for Belgians to follow in their resistance.[77] This was precisely the path for which Cardinal Mercier would later advocate in his pastoral letter; Max planned to remain strong and await the day of liberation at the end of the war. Max became a martyr for the Belgian nation and his story was commonly celebrated in unionist papers. In addition to their unjustified treatment of Max, reports quickly spread throughout Belgium of "German atrocities" committed against defenseless Belgian civilians. Not only had Germany violated Belgian neutrality (which it had pledged to uphold in 1839), but the Germans were occasionally ruthless in their treatment of Belgians during the invasion and subsequent policies of the occupational regime.

It was primarily the Flemings' and Walloons' mutual detest of the Germans which served as the catalyst for the expansion of Belgian identity during World War I. At the onset of the invasion, a wave of anti-German sentiment swept across Belgium. This hatred only became more deeply engrained as the war dragged on. Unionist publishers knew that writing anti-German material was a simple and effective way to garner support for the Belgian nation, and they had many facets from which to choose. Renan asserted in "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?" that "shared suffering unites more than does joy. In fact, periods of mourning are worth more to national memory than triumphs because they impose duties

[77] Pirenne, *La Belgique et la guerre mondiale*, 83, 110.

and require a common effort."[78] For Belgians, the German invasion and occupation served as the most challenging and strenuous event in the country's history to that time. Thousands of civilian refugees fled ahead of the advancing German army, and those who remained faced severe rations and food shortages.[79] Liberties such as freedom of speech, the press, and movement were strictly limited, and refusing to cooperate with German orders could result in the offender being deported to a German labor camp.[80] Alongside the execution of innocent civilians, the Germans also completely destroyed entire villages and parts of cities, such as the library of the Catholic University of Leuven, on their advance through the country. Belgians writ large suffered severely every day during the occupation, and the root of the suffering was abundantly clear. The combination of extreme suffering and a clearly defined enemy permitted Flemings and Walloons to more easily unite against the source of their collective suffering. Given the multitude of German offenses against Belgians, it was evident that denouncing the Germans would be an easy way to rally citizens to defend the Belgian nation.

The inaugural edition of *La Libre Belgique* featured excerpts focused on the annexation of Belgium, violation of Belgian neutrality, and reports of German atrocities to raise awareness for the suffering of readers' Belgian compatriots. In "A New Chapter to Add to the German Atrocities," Victor Jourdain described how Belgian civilians accused of franc-tireurs activity had been loaded into a cattle car and given little to no food to eat

[78] Ernest Renan, "Que'est-ce qu'une nation?," 10. Accessed April 14, 2018.
[79] Peter Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England During the Great War* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.), 1982; Amara and Roland, Gouverner en Belgique occupée, 31-40.
[80] See the case of Henri Pirenne at his condemnation of "von Bissing University."

for days, resulting in the deaths of some innocent Belgians.[81] By provoking outrage among the readership at the unjustified and abhorrent treatment of civilians, Jourdian sought to foster mistrust and animosity against the Germans to ensure that Belgians refused to accept their authority. Recalling the Germans' intentional destruction of the celebrated library at the Catholic University of Leuven, unionist publishers labeled the Germans as "les barbares." [82] Similarly, articles about the Germans' violation of Belgian neutrality attempted to prevent the Germans from acquiring legitimacy as the governing power in Belgium. One contributor to *La Libre Belgique* later described neutrality as "the passion of our resistance" toward the Germans, calling upon Belgians to maintain their nonviolent stance and await the day of liberation.[83] Though throughout 1915 the clandestine press incorporated the three pillars of Belgian identity relatively evenly, appeals to anti-German sentiment increased drastically from 1916 on due to increased German attempts to divide the Flemish and Walloons.

[81] *La Libre Belgique* No. 1, February 1915, Archives Générales du Royaume. Reports such as these were the primary focus of Jeff Lipkes' work *Rehearsals: The German Army in Belgium, 1914-1918* (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2007).
[82] *La Libre Belgique* No. 26, June 1915.
[83] Pierre Goemaere, *La Libre Belgique clandestine*, 97.

Chapter Three: Germinating Separatism

As prohibited journals continued to spread throughout the occupied territory, the German Government-General recognized the abilities of the clandestine press to dissuade Belgian citizens from cooperating with German officials and challenge German authority. Though these concerns subsided to some degree as the number of illicit prints in circulation declined after November 1916 due to devastatingly effective German raids on clandestine editors and printers, their resolve to facilitate the governing of Belgium and eliminate the clandestine press remained.[84] In an attempt to push back against the Belgian unionists responsible for promoting a pan-Belgian identity, the German government reinvigorated their efforts to revive antagonistic attitudes between Flemings and Walloons via *Flamenpolitik.* The Governor-General not only mobilized the censored press to run divisive articles, but they also attempted to create specific spaces for the Flemish in public life. German leadership calculated that if they were able to successfully divide the two nations into factions as European powers had done to indigenous populations in their overseas colonies, Belgium would become easier to govern during the war and to annex afterward.

As early as January 1915, the newly established Governor-General, Baron von Bissing, established "a commission to treat the question of nationalities" within Belgium.[85] This commission was tasked with examining how various governmental relations with the Flemish would facilitate the annexation of Belgium, or at the very least, Flanders, after German victory in the war. Despite von Bissing's determination to incorporate Belgium into the German Empire, some in the German imperial government displayed little interest

[84] De Schaepdrijver and Debruyne, "Sursum Corda: The Underground Press in Occupied Belgium, 1914-1918," 30.
[85] Clough, *The Flemish Movement in Belgium*, 180-181.

in such a notion. But von Bissing had the support of three of the most powerful German leaders during the war: the Kaiser, General von Hindenburg, and General Ludendorff. All three men "recognized the military value of Belgium and [supported] Flemish agitation and the exploitation of the country."[86] Yet their support for the scheme was far from the fervency and assuredness of the importance of retaining Belgium as that of von Bissing.

In a letter to Gustav Stresemann, a wartime member of the Reichstag and future short-tenured chancellor of the Weimar Republic, von Bissing expressed his view that "if we [Germany] do not get Belgium into our sphere of power, and if we do not govern it in German fashion (and use it in German fashion) the war is lost…"[87] It was with these goals in mind that von Bissing attempted to gain favor with Flemish activists. He did so by fulfilling Flemish demands for a Flemish-speaking university and privileging Flemings in Belgian society. Though this *Flamenpolitik* manifested in a variety of ways, the three examples discussed in this chapter received substantial attention in the clandestine press due to their blatant rebuke of Belgian identity. From 1916 to 1918, the Governor-General converted the French-speaking University of Ghent into what became known as the Flemish-speaking "von Bissing University" in 1916, created a puppet government called the Council of Flanders in 1917, and the established the Flemish-German society to foster closer ties between Germans and Flemish collaborators.

"von Bissing University"

[86] Ibid, 186.
[87] *General von Bissing's Testament: A Study in German Ideals*, ed. Anonymous (London: Alabaster, Passmore & Sons, Ltd., 1917), 31.

In the decades prior to World War I, Flemish activists advocated for a university that allowed them to get an education in their mother tongue. These discussions were beginning to find traction in the Belgian parliament just before the war, but were tabled upon news of the invasion.[88] Once the Government-General settled in for what they accepted as an undetermined stay, it started attempting to reform Belgian state institutions. In December 1915, the Government-General set aside funds to support the re-opening of Belgian universities, with specific support for a Flemish-speaking university. In February 1916, the Government inquired as to whether professors at the University of Ghent were able to instruct in Flemish and, if so, inquire as to whether they would consider teaching again.[89] All but five faculty members of the original University of Ghent staff refused or declined to participate, and two protesting members—one of them the staunch Belgian nationalist and Belgian historian Henri Pirenne—so fervently rejected the notion that their responses resulted in their deportation to German labor camps.[90]

When the University of Ghent finally re-opened in the fall of 1916 as a Flemish-speaking institution, the credibility of the University had been widely dismissed by most Belgians as "an instrument of German politics."[91] This view was further reinforced when General von Bissing himself gave the keynote address at the opening ceremony in October 1916.[92] von Bissing, already a favorite subject of ridicule by Belgian unionists, faced a

[88] Pirenne, *La Belgique et la Guerre Mondiale*, 215. Pirenne's account of the affair is frequently cited in this section, as he was a professor of history at the University of Ghent before and after the war. For more information, see: Shepard B. Clough, *A History of the Flemish Movement in Belgium*, (New York: Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1930), 193.
[89] Clough, *A History of the Flemish Movement in Belgium*, 216-217.
[90] Ibid, 125.
[91] Ibid, 218.
[92] Ibid.

barrage of criticism from the clandestine press. An issue of *La Libre Belgique* published in November 1916 called von Bissing a "sinister bird of prey" and featured a satirical "transcript" of his speech. After joking that they had obtained the transcript from the censored dailies *La Belgique* and *Le Bruxellois*, they continued:

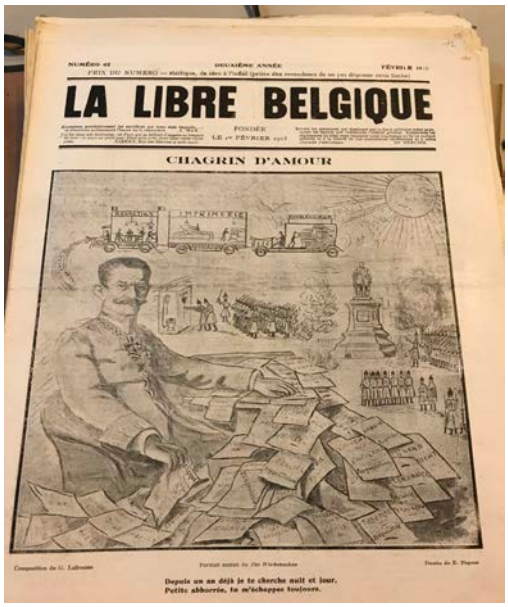
> A man in a helmet [von Bissing] takes a paper from his pocket and reads, in German, a never-ending speech in a nasally voice: 'I invited you all to announce the opening of the University… Over are the days of franco-belgian fraternization… The University of Ghent will be, by the grace of God *(their old Gott!)*, a spineless *(sic.)* Flemish colony.[93]

In addition to this caricature of von Bissing, the article also outright condemns those who facilitated or attended the newly christened "von Bissing University." *La Libre Belgique* referred to them as "traitors" and "maniacs of rabid Flemingism" before calling on "all loyal Flemings" to turn their backs on those complicit in the affair.[94]

To properly understand the literary tactics of the clandestine press, it is necessary to examine the original French. The phrase "takes a paper from his pocket," originally "tire un papier de sa boche," is a play on the words pocket, "poche," and the derogatory term for a German, "Boche." The author of the fabricated story from *La Libre Belgique* suggests that the Belgian collaborators on stage with von Bissing are quite literally in the pocket of the Germans. Similarly, the word "vertébrale" (spineless) is used, which is a play on the word "véritable," meaning "true" or "truly." By including (sic.) afterward, the authors intended for this to be a tongue-in-cheek reference to von Bissing's Germaness as well as

[93] Albert van de Kerckhove (Fidelis), "Le châtiment," *La Libre Belgique No. 98,* November 1916, Archives of Corneille Gram, Folder 23, Archives Générales du Royaume.
[94] Ibid.

a Freudian slip regarding the Germans' true perception of Flemish collaborators. Belittling of von Bissing had been a pastime of *La Libre Belgique* since its creation, occasionally


LA LIBRE BELGIQUE

CHAGRIN D'AMOUR

Depuis un an déjà je te cherche nuit et jour.
Petite abhorrée, tu m'échappes toujours.

Figure 1: General von Bissing examines documents searching for a lead on *La Libre Belgique*, while the "cave automobile" continues publishing.


LA LIBRE BELGIQUE

BULLETIN DE PROPAGANDE PATRIOTIQUE — RÉGULIÈREMENT IRRÉGULIER

AVIS.

SON EXCELLENCE LE GOUVERNEUR Bon VON BISSING ET SON AMIE INTIME

RESTONS CALMES!!!

L'ORDRE SOCIAL TOUT ENTIER DÉFENDU PAR LA BELGIQUE.

PRIERE DE FAIRE CIRCULER CE BULLETIN

Figure 2: "His excellency, Governor von Bissing, and his beloved friend."

accompanied by a well-drawn caricature (Figures 1 and 2). Humor and satire were used to contrast from the perception of Germans as "barbarians," but also to intentionally irk the German command which was already frustrated at their inability to silence the paper.[95]

Criticism of "von Bissing University" and its affiliates also came from the Flemish clandestine press. Authors belittled the affair in the October 1916 edition of *De Vlaamsche Leeuw*, dismissively publishing in an article entitled "Down with the German High School!"[96] In response to the University of Ghent affair in 1916, the underground paper *L'écho* berated General von Bissing by declaring that no Belgian parents would want their children "to attend a university founded by an enemy of the state" and that only the Belgian government had the right to appoint professors to Belgian universities.[97] Similarly, *Patrie!* asserted that the Flemish university and attempt to separate the Flemish from the Walloons in University was an affront to Belgian history. The states that "the two nationalities which were united at the founding of our country, while each conserved its dialect, have existed peacefully side by side."[98] Belgians by and large rejected the legitimacy of the university, and its enrollment numbers dwindled. While a small number of Belgians (primarily Flemish activists) continued to attend the university, the mistrust of the German governance of the university combined with an already diminished pool of university-aged men due to the war resulted in a victory for Belgian nationalists.

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[95] For more information on this, see Eugène van Doren, *Les tribulations du "manager" de la Libre Belgique clandestine.*
[96] "Weg met de Duitsche Hoogechool!" *De Vlaamsche Leeuw* No. 8, October 1916.
[97] De Schaepdrijver and Debruyne, "Sursum Corda: The Underground Press in Occupied Belgium, 1914-1918," 29.
[98] *Patrie!* No. 6, March 1916.

De Raad van Vlaanderen

The most significant German attempt to gain favor with Flemish activists came in January and February 1917 when the Germans permitted the creation of the *Raad van Vlaanderen*, or the Council of Flanders.[99] In January, various Flemish activist groups drafted a document which declared that "the Flemings demand full and complete independence and autonomy for Flanders and the immediate realization of all the measures that must permit it."[100] The Council of Flanders assembled in Brussels on February 4 under the guise of the Government-General to act as the officially recognized body of the Flemish people, despite not having a true democratic mandate.[101] On March 3, the German chancellor received the delegation from the Council in Berlin and declared that Germany would do all that it could in peace negotiations to ensure "the free development of the Flemish race."[102] Before the end of the month, von Bissing declared the administrative separation of Flanders and Wallonia.[103] Administrative separation was a key part of the German plan to divide Belgium. By slowly dividing the country and establishing a puppet government in Flanders, von Bissing and the German high command envisioned the eventual dissolution of the Belgian state and nation. Though administrative separation was not officially enacted until 1917, the Germans had been gradually implementing the policy for over a year.

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[99] Michaël Amara and Hubert Roland, *Gouverner en Belgique occupée: Oscar von der Lancken-Wakenitz – Rapports d'activité 1915-1918*, (P.I.E.-Peter Lang, Brussels: 2004), 24-25.
[100] Quoted in ibid, 24, note 34.
[101] Henri Pirenne, *La Belgique et la guerre mondiale*, 226-228.
[102] Ibid, 228.
[103] Ibid, 229.

Throughout 1916, the Government-General meticulously reformed Belgian state institutions from federally to regionally oriented. Rather than have a single Ministry of Sciences and Arts for both Flanders and Wallonia, the Government-General divided the agency to create a separate ministry for each of these two nations.[104] The Germans hoped that by shifting civic loyalties from the Belgian state to Flemish and Walloon institutions, those who culturally identified with Flanders or Wallonia would re-imagine their civic identity from Belgian to their respective cultural identity. Thus, they permitted the creation of the Council of Flanders in the hope that it would legitimize the administrative separation of Flanders and Wallonia. While this aligned with German interests to facilitate the annexation of Belgium, Flemish activists in the Council seemed unaware that Germany's true plans were to annex all Belgian lands.

In a January 1917 edition of *La Libre Belgique*, the editors decried the anticipated creation of the *Raad van Vlaanderen* and similar German attempts at garnering support for separatism among Walloons. In a direct appeal to both Flemings and Walloons, Victor Jourdain wrote that,

> For real Belgians, there can only be a single national motto, that of the *patrie*: 'Unity makes strength.' The enemy has adopted, as witnessed by its politics in Belgium, another motto, that of 'divide and rule,' in order to bring us under its domination.[105]

By appealing directly to cultural Flemings and Walloons in the title of the article, Jourdain fought to at least maintain their civic loyalties to Belgium in the face of increasingly effective German separatist tactics. In March of 1917, seven representatives from the Council of Flanders travelled to Berlin as the proclaimed "official representatives" of

[104] Amara and Roland, *Gouverner en Belgique occupée*, 25.
[105] *La Libre Belgique* No. 105, January 1917, Archives Générales du Royaume.

Flanders. In the July 1917 edition of *De Vlaamsche Leeuw*, excerpts entitled "Het Activism" and "*De Raad van Vlaanderen*" condemned Flemish activism and belittled the seven delegates who met the German chancellor in Berlin.[106] Describing them as the "seven insignificant representatives who went to Berlin to bow to the man 'who does not force' [Chancellor von Bethmann Hollweg]," the authors dismissed the self-proclaimed legitimacy of the council and affirmed that only the official Belgian government had the right to represent Belgians in official state functions.[107] Over the course of the next year, the underground press continuously berated Flemish activists who participated in the Council. Though the Council of Flanders was the most infamous German institution to privilege the Flemish in society in occupied Belgium, the Government-General created separate elite social groups to tempt Flemings into collaboration.

De Deutsch-Vlaemische Gesellschaft[108]

On April 29, 1918, a group of men dressed in formal attire gathered in Brussels at the ornately decorated Concert Noble ballroom on the Rue d'Arlon, located just one kilometer from the Belgian Royal Palace. During times of peace, the walls of the ballroom would have featured the portraits of Belgian royalty. What was being discussed on this occasion was considered by Belgian nationalists, as well as the Belgian government-in-exile, to be treason. In attendance were roughly three dozen Flemish and German intellectuals and aristocrats meeting for the German-Flemish Association. One of the men in attendance, René de Clercq, was a staunch Flemish nationalist, a professor at von

[106] *De Vlaamsche Leeuw* No. 15, July 1917, Archives Générales du Royaume.
[107] Ibid.
[108] "The German-Flemish Society"

Bissing's University of Ghent, and an editor for the German-funded Flemish newspaper *De Vlaamsche Stem* (The Flemish Voice).[109] The rest of the men who comprised the group ranged from Ministers in various Flemish cabinets to prominent Flemish lawyers.[110] All those in attendance shared a common interest: increased separation of Flanders from the Belgian government.

The crowd had gathered in the Concert Noble to witness Dr. August Borms' presentation on French Flanders, which described the tribulations of the Flemish as an ethnic and linguistic minority within the French empire for centuries.[111] One Flemish nationalist summarized Borms' speech by writing:

> The speaker, in an eloquent presentation and filled with warm and infectious conviction, concluded by asserting the idea that the day will come, where French Flanders and Belgian Flanders would be one, under the aegis of the lion as the silhouette shines high from the tower of one of the old churches… the lion which is none other than the Lion of Flanders.[112]

In the eyes of Flemish nationalists, a thorough attempt to establish a Flemish state would require incorporating all Flemish lands and communities—even those which had been separated for nearly a century.[113] The Flemish region of northern France had remained within French borders after the fall of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815 and was still the northernmost region of France by the onset of the war. This border disparity fit the German

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[109] Karen Dale Shelby, "Conflicted Nationalism and World War I in Belgium: Memory and Museum Design," (New York: City University of New York 2008). René de Clercq was considered a "martyr" of the Flemish nationalist movement (Shelby, 102). See also: Sophie de Shaepdrijver, "Occupation, Propaganda, and the Idea of Belgium," 267-294.
[110] André Norz, ed. "Ère nouvelle: Séance de l'association germano-flammande." Les annales politiques, 1918, Archives Générales du Royaume, 82.
[111] Ibid, 84-85.
[112] Ibid.
[113] These lands included regions of Flanders located in France, notably the area which included the towns of Dunkirk and Lille.

plan to divide and control beautifully. Flemish activists assumed that German officials would permit the full reunification of Flanders upon the German defeat of France. While the region would be united into a single governing body, it would have remained under German rule. The implication that the Germans might unite the Flemish homeland a powerful incentive for collaboration from Flemish activists sympathetic to their German brethren.

A summary of the "French Flanders" conference, along with other accounts of the German-Flemish Association, were found in the weekly censured Brussels newspaper, *L'Information de Bruxelles*. In 1918, the director of the paper, André Norz, published his own edited work of "the most remarkable articles of '*L'information de Bruxelles*' and other Belgian journals," which he titled *Les annales politiques.*[114] In this series, he included a variety of articles discussing what he purportedly considered to be some of the most relevant issues of the time, particularly those which focus on the identity conflict between Flemings and Walloons. Notably, in the foreword of the third volume, Norz specifically mentions the significance of the Flemish and Walloon nationalist movements and their long-term implications. Yet Norz stops short of making any explicit reference to the Belgian nation, let alone any mention of any pillars of Belgian identity found in the clandestine press.[115]

Regardless of intention, the articles contained within Norz's work, such as the report on the German-Flemish Association, reveal much about how sympathizers of each national identity found an outlet in journals supported by the German *Pressestelle*. The

[114] Norz, *Les annales politiques*, 1, Archives Générales du Royaume.
[115] Ibid.

third edition of *Les annales politiques* alone featured articles such as "Walloon Autonomy: Its justification, advantages, and perspectives" and "The Walloon Question" alongside "The Flemish Question," a response to the formerly mentioned article regarding Wallonia.[116] By merely raising awareness of the debate over national identity to readers, the German press hoped to highlight the increasingly visible tensions between the two nations to trigger a shift in cultural and civic loyalties from the Belgian nation to the nation of either Flanders or Wallonia.

Upon reading the transcript of one of Dr. Borms' similar speeches in the June 9 edition of *L'Information*, contributors to *La Libre Belgique* published their condemnation of his collaboration with the German social democrats to advance the interests of what he referred to as the "European proletariat."[117] In their second June edition, they wrote,

> How dare you speak about democracy, you lackey of the last European autocracy? For four years the Flemish people lie on land that has been destroyed, oppressed, ruined. For four years you have pretended to speak in its [Flanders'] name, and for four years the iron hand of its executioner has kept a gag over its mouth. All liberties have been stripped away, except for those of the traitor, and you have the audacity to speak about democracy![118]

In his speech, Borms had endorsed German democracy as "the most democratic" and celebrated his opportunity to work with the German social democratic party. As Borms supported the inherently undemocratic Council of Flanders, *La Libre Belgique* was deeply offended that he would pretend to support democracy abroad while his fellow Belgians had been stripped of their own ability to vote freely.

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[116] Ibid, 16-121.
[117] *La Libre Belgique* No. 154, June 1918, Archives Générales du Royaume.
[118] Ibid.

Sickened by the activists of the German-Flemish society like Dr. Borms, the underground paper *De Vlaamsche Wachter* (The Flemish Guard) continued to decry those betrayed Belgium. In May of 1918, the editors condemned both Flemish nationalist parties in the Council of Flanders, the Unionists and the Young Flemish. According to the editors, the Young Flemish party's ultimate goal was "a very independent Flanders," meaning a country that is completely separate from Belgium and where Flemings' civic and cultural loyalties would be to the united Flemish state.[119] While the editors of *De Vlaamsche Wachter* did not ridicule Unionists as much as the Young-Flemish due to their civic loyalty to the Belgian nation, these unionists were still Flemish nationalists who saw the union with Wallonia as a beneficial economic and political union. Even among those who were cultural Flemings but remained civic Belgians there was disagreement over the degree of autonomy Flanders should have from the Belgian government. Flemish unionists emphasized that their civic national loyalties should remain to the Belgian state, while their cultural identity should remain Flemish. The authors of *De Vlaamsche Wachter* clearly framed the situation for their readers through a Belgian nationalist lens:

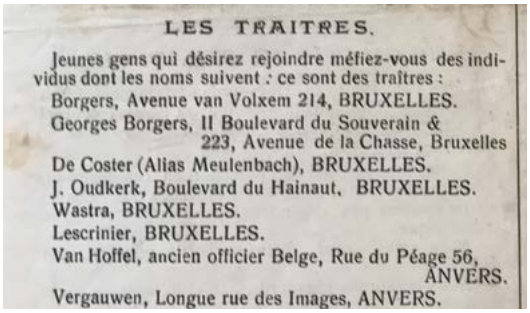
> The Unionists want a connection with the Belgian state, between Flanders and Wallonia. And now there is a fight in the household. […] In the end, we hardly care about that wrangling, and we [Belgian nationalists] remain a smiling observer, convinced that neither the Young Flemish, nor the Unionists will have to decide how Belgium and Flanders will be redesigned, because we know that that task is reserved for those who did not betray. Long live the one, independent Belgium!

By dismissing both Flemish unionists and separatists as traitors to Belgium, Belgian unionists warned readers not to fall prey to the promises of increased power for Flemings. *De Vlaamsche Wachter* ascertained that both the Young Flemish and Unionist parties

[119] *De Vlaamsche Wachter*, May 1918, HetArchief.be, accessed April 3, 2018.

collaborated with the Germans simply by acknowledging their authority in the country, and that doing so undermined the legitimacy of the Belgian government.

While clandestine publications in the Dutch vernacular wrote considerably more articles condemning Flemish activists than publications in French, editors publishing in both languages fought back against collaborators. One such French publication was a pamphlet entitled *Patrie!*, which went one step further in their condemnation of those who betrayed the Belgian nation. Within many of its editions, it included a list of names of Belgian citizens whom the editors had deemed traitors. Offenses deemed severe enough to warrant exposure ranged from nonviolent collaboration with the Germans to attempts to join the German army. These lists often included the name of the accused, a brief summary of their supposed offense, their professional occupation, and even their last known address.[120] Those who the paper named faced ostracism from Belgian civic circles and, in instances where accusations of treason were later confirmed, occasionally had to flee the country.



LES TRAITRES.

Jeunes gens qui désirez rejoindre méfiez-vous des individus dont les noms suivent : ce sont des traîtres :

Borgers, Avenue van Volxem 214, BRUXELLES.
Georges Borgers, II Boulevard du Souverain & 223, Avenue de la Chasse, Bruxelles
De Coster (Alias Meulenbach), BRUXELLES.
J. Oudkerk, Boulevard du Hainaut, BRUXELLES.
Wastra, BRUXELLES.
Lescrinier, BRUXELLES.
Van Hoffel, ancien officier Belge, Rue du Péage 56, ANVERS.
Vergauwen, Longue rue des Images, ANVERS.

The clandestinely published pamphlet *Patrie!* often printed the information of those who failed to uphold their civic responsibilities to the Belgian nation.

[120] *Patrie!* No. 6, March 1916, Archives Générales du Royaume.

Similar to *Patrie!*, *La Libre Belgique* also took it upon themselves to oust separatist activists. While Flemish activists at the Council of Flanders received the bulk of the scrutiny in the clandestine press, *La Libre Belgique* reminded readers that Walloon separatism was just as treasonous as Flemish. In the January 1918 edition of *La Libre Belgique*, one of the headlines declared that the editors had discovered "a group of Walloon-boches." These Walloon collaborators, according to *La Libre Belgique*, had been sanctioned and funded by the Governor-General to start a Walloon separatist paper entitled *Le Peuple wallon.*[121] But this was not the only objective of the organization; its secondary goal was "the degradation of the Belgian government and the deposing of King Albert."[122] The offenses of the Walloons who undermined the legitimacy of the crown and promoted Walloon identity over Belgian were severe enough that unionist publishers felt the individuals deserved direct retribution. Emulating *Patrie!*, the article proceeded to state the name, address, and any collaborative or treasonous actions taken by the members of *Le Peuple wallon*. By rebuking their linguistic kin and ensuring that traitors to the Belgian nation were exposed, be they Flemish activists in the German-Flemish society or Walloon sponsors of *Le Peuple wallon*, the underground press attempted to dissuade Flemish and Walloon activists alike from undermining the Belgian nation.[123]

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[121] *La Libre Belgique* No. 142, January 1918, Archives Générales du Royaume.
[122] Ibid.
[123] De Vlaamsche Waachter also condemned "Walloon activists," in May 1918, proclaiming, "Not only in Flanders are there activists; there are also some in Wallonia. There are also people who 'like to earn a penny' from the Germans, because they are also supported by the Germans there. Have the Walloons suddenly become a Germanic people, for whom the German brother's heart beats? Well now, but they want Belgium to divorce, they want to weaken our country, and thus they are friends of the Teutons!" *De Vlaamsche Waachter* No. 7, May 1918, hetarchief.be, accessed April 4, 2018.

Conclusion

The German invasion and occupation of Belgium in 1914 provided a unique opportunity for Belgian nationalists to convince Flemings and Walloons to re-imagine themselves as part of a common Belgian community. Faced with a national crisis, unionists in the clandestine press sought to reconcile the Flemish and Walloon communities by depicting the Germans as the enemy to all members of Belgian society. As Renan had predicted in his 1882 speech, the suffering and tribulations Belgians experienced during the occupation resulted in the expansion of the Belgian nation. To assist in fostering this sentiment, the clandestine press regularly published articles which reminded readers of their shared Catholic heritage, loyalty to the Belgian crown, and the offenses Germany committed against Belgian citizens. Each of these pillars of Belgian identity played a vital role in establishing a foundation upon which Belgian nationalists could supplant the Flemish or Walloon communities with that of the Belgian nation. With the signing of the armistice in November of 1918 and subsequent German withdrawal from Belgium, Belgians celebrated the day of liberation for which they had yearned for years. Belgium had survived the war, and the country finally appeared to achieve "unity through strength."

In the years following the First World War, stories about the brave Belgian patriots who risked their lives to resist the Germans became legendary. Throughout the country, Commissions for National Recognition were established to provide governmental awards for Belgians who acted patriotically and in the interest of the country during the war. To be considered for these awards, survivors could petition for recognition for themselves or attest on behalf of others. In Liège, one Monsieur Leopold-Henri attested that he was a distributor for *La Libre Belgique, La Revue de la Presse*, and the *Mot du Soldat* in his

application of recognition to the committee.[124] The recognition program was part of King Albert's attempts to preserve the outpouring of Belgian nationalist fervor that developed during the war. Those who had defended the *Patrie*—occasionally with their lives—were elevated to the status of national heroes.

King Albert hoped to capitalize on the support for the Belgian nation by pursuing reconciliatory policies with the Flemish. In a speech made to Belgian leaders on November 22, 1918, he acknowledged the need for Flemish-speaking institutions, stating:

> A reciprocal respect of interests of the Flemings and the Walloons ought to exist in the administration in order to give each one the certainty of being understood in his language and to assure him his full intellectual development, especially in higher education…The Government will propose to Parliament the creation of a Flemish university at Ghent […].[125]

Ironically, Albret, the incarnation of Belgian identity himself, called for a continuation of the very institution the Germans established as a means to foster discord. Once the subject of much ridicule and disdain within the clandestine press, the "flamandisation" of the University of Ghent returned to the forefront of Belgian politics shortly after the armistice. King Albert quickly called for the University of Ghent to become a Flemish-speaking university, this time under the direction of the Belgian government. This action signaled Albert's awareness of the need to provide the Flemings with some concessions to keep Flemish activism at bay. Citing the patriotic sentiments stemming from the liberation of the country, unionists hoped that this would be a new era of national harmony among Belgians. Yet as early as 1919, cracks began to emerge in the foundations of Belgian identity.

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[124] Leopold-Henri. "Rapport Sur Le Travail Patriotique." October 11, 1920. Box 60. Archives de l'État à Liège.
[125] Clough, *The Flemish Movement in Belgium*, 219-220.

In the elections of 1919 the Front party, a Flemish nationalist coalition and offshoot of the Flemish Movement, emerged and managed to seat five representatives in the Belgian parliament.[126] In the interwar years, this party would gain increasing support from Flemish citizens. Though it started primarily as a relatively moderate group advocating specifically for Flemish interests, the party developed into Belgium's fascist party the mid-1930s. At the same time, groups of Flemings continued a yearly pilgrimage to a site outside the town of Dixmuide begun the year after the armistice to commemorate the Flemish soldiers who gave their lives "in the defense of Flanders" during the war.[127] This pilgrimage grew to the point that a tower was erected on the site in 1930; this tower would eventually become marred by its affiliation with the far-right Flemish leaders who collaborated with the Nazis during the Second World War.[128]

In a roundabout manner, German *Flamenpolitik* during the First World War greatly facilitated their administration of Belgium during the Second. Flemish extremists recalled the privileges they received under the previous German occupation and, by 1939, had increasingly began to identify the Flemish as a Germanic people. Again, Belgian nationalists picked up a pen instead of a sword. During World War II, multiple different groups began publishing clandestine journals named *La Libre Belgique* as homage to the beloved paper of the First World War.[129] After the Second World War, various political

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[126] Ibid, 229-230.
[127] Karen Dale Shelby, "Conflicted Nationalism and World War I in Belgium: Memory and Museum Design," (New York: City University of New York, 2008), 1. The site was specifically chosen due to its significance as the location where the Allies halted the German advance.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Christian Laporte, "Du 'Patriote' à 'La Libre Belgique,'" *LaLibre.be*, August 2, 2014, accessed March 9, 2018.

parties supporting the Flemish identity emerged on a spectrum ranging from a simple emphasis on Flemish identity to calls for an outright separate Flemish State.[130] These tensions even culminated in a 589-day government shutdown from 2010 to 2011 due to the inability between Flemish and Walloon parties to form coalitions large enough to govern.[131]

While an outpouring of pro-Belgian propaganda emerged during World War I, the withdrawal of the Germans in 1918 removed the pillar of identity which served as the catalyst for the expansion of Belgian nation. Without the Germans as a mutual antagonist, this pillar of Belgian identity crumbled. The removal of the pillar toppled much of the progress made by the clandestine press in nurturing a Belgian identity in the minds of Flemish and Walloon nationalists. In this instance, the Belgian nation which Renan expected to emerge through mutual struggle did not come to fruition. Though a powerful uniting force during the occupation, Flemish and Walloon consent to be part of the Belgian nation proved to be a little more than a brief historical moment. While the clandestine press is a prime example of the central role played by print media in the re-imagining of a nation, its efforts were not enough to unite two independent nations into a lasting, unified Belgian community.

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[130] Some political parties, such as the Flemish Interest party, had xenophobic and racist ideas so central to their party platform that it was "dissolved in 2004 after [being] condemned by a High Court for 'permanent incitation to discrimination and racism.'" Norsk Senter for Forskningsdata. "Belgium - Political Parties." Norwegian Centre for Research Data, 2015.

[131] Valerie Strauss. "589 Days with No Elected Government: What Happened in Belgium." *The Washington Post*, October 1, 2013.

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