

CÉLINE RASE

RADIO IN UNIFORM

German radio propaganda in occupied Belgium (1940-1944)

May 1940. Belgium is occupied by Germany. Swept along in a war that was not its own, the country fell silent. The Belgian National Institute for Radio Broadcasting chose to flee the country while the occupier took possession of the abandoned building on the *Place Flagey*. Assisted by Belgian collaborating personnel, they established a broadcasting programme that was transmitted by means of German mobile transmitting equipment. Radio Brussels was born.

For four years, the radio service served the German interest by transmitting music, drama, sketches, games and sport coverage. In the course of 1942, the programming was reorganised. From now on, the selection of radio programmes showed a particular care for variety and regularity, thus hoping to gain the confidence of the listeners. In reality, under the pretext of entertainment, and by using Belgian radio voices, Radio Brussels aimed at spreading German propaganda pure and simple. Any truth as to the military situation was systematically removed from the censored news bulletins. The so-called 'echoes from the battlefield' constantly announced the imminent German victory.

In occupied Belgium, this discourse was only partially successful. Yet, quite a few Belgians listened to Radio Brussels. They found a means of relaxation and some useful information concerning provisioning. Rare were the listeners who actually believed the German news. The propaganda was grotesque and immediately contradicted by the daily reality of the occupation. Radio Brussels talked about the affluence of food while the country was starving. The radio service praised the kindness of the occupying authorities and the mildness of the regime, while the population suffered arbitrary executions and forced transportations to Germany.