

par les mouvements de libération du joug colonial resteront lettre morte tant qu'elles ne bénéficieront pas à toutes et tous. Finalement, il semble que Song échoue à rendre compte du pouvoir d'action des femmes africaines. Elle conclut plutôt sur leur difficulté à se solidariser autour d'une 'conscience de classe' commune. Cette affirmation mérite d'être nuancée. En effet, elle éclipse la multiplicité des réalités socio-historiques du continent africain et des mouvements de femmes qui s'y déploient. Ce qu'elle reconnaît à l'ancien colonisé – le courage de 's'arracher à soi'² pour clamer son propre nom – Song ne semble pas l'accorder aux femmes africaines: or, ne sont-elles pas, elles aussi, dotées de 'mains humaines pour s'écrire'?

À partir du cas bruxellois, la sociologue Louise Carlier s'interroge sur la notion de cosmopolitisme. En prenant appui sur des témoignages, elle déduit que le cosmopolitisme ne peut se problématiser sans tenir compte de la question raciale – et invite les autorités publiques à s'emparer de cette notion. Alors que les personnes blanches comparent leur passage dans un espace urbain non familier à l'expérience du voyageur qui découvre des contrées 'exotiques', une expérience similaire semble au contraire 'particulièrement éprouvant[e]' pour les personnes appartenant aux minorités visibles. Cet écart s'explique par les contrôles de police réguliers que ces dernières subissent et qui leur dénie le droit de circuler librement. Ce différentiel d'hospitalité, 'hypertrophié' ou 'atrophie' en fonction du phénotype, mériterait d'être consolidé par des données statistiques. Par ailleurs, au vu de la centralité de la 'race' dans ses recherches, Carlier gagnerait à rattacher cette dimension au 'spectre colonial' qui continue de hanter les interactions sociales contemporaines. En tant qu'ancienne métropole chargée de la gestion de colonies, Bruxelles ne fait pas exception. Finalement, un des points forts de son analyse se situe dans son double ancrage, théorique et expérientiel. Carlier mobilise avec clarté des concepts tirés de la sociologie urbaine,

qu'elle vient ensuite affiner sur base des regards des enquêtés. Elle répond ainsi à l'ambition décoloniale défendue par l'ouvrage consistant à reconnaître le 'statut de pensée' aux explications des personnes qui peuplent les terrains de recherche.

Au terme de la lecture de cet ouvrage, nous retenons principalement trois éléments.

Chaque auteur esquisse des pistes d'exploration nées de la rencontre entre sa discipline et les *postcolonial studies*. Comme l'annonce le titre, la pensée décoloniale qu'ils déploient prend la forme d'un trajet, en permanente reconstruction. Ensuite, cet ouvrage invite les chercheurs à questionner leurs postures et pratiques scientifiques, de façon à élaborer des savoirs qui visent la 'transformation méliorative' des sociétés. En naviguant entre les échelles locales et globales, chaque contribution pose finalement la question du 'comment faire l'humanité ensemble?'. Elles interrogent notre rapport à l'altérité et participent à identifier les obstacles qui empêchent l'éclosion d'une 'politique du semblable' où 'l'Autre' n'incarnerait 'rien d'autre que nous-même'.

Juliette Linard

MICHAEL AUWERS

The Failed Coup of Belgian Diplomacy. Diplomats and Foreign Policy Making in the First World War

Brussels, Archives générales du Royaume/
Algemeen Rijksarchief, 2022, 228 p.

During the First World War the Belgian government, in exile at St. Adresse near Le Havre, pursued a cautious foreign policy, declining to formally ally itself with Germany's enemies in case doing so might interfere with its key war aim of restoring Belgian territory and statehood. However, a section of Belgian politicians, including prime minister Charles de Broqueville, felt that the war presented an opportunity to gain, following the war's successful conclusion, financial compensation for the invasion from Germany, but also

2. ACHILLE MBEMBE, *Critique de la raison nègre*, Paris, La Découverte, 2013, 244.

security guarantees from the Allies and territorial aggrandizement at the expense of Luxembourg and the Netherlands. In the immediate post-war months, this became the guiding principle of the new Belgian international politics.

Michael Auwers' book seeks to help us understand *why* Belgium moved away from neutralism to a much more pro-active, annexationist stance. Auwers does not question the narrative of why this short phase of Belgian expansionism, aimed at gaining control over Luxembourg and the flows of the Meuse and Scheldt rivers in Dutch Limburg and Zeeland, came to nought, but how it came to be seen as a viable foreign policy option. His argument is, basically, that the authors of the shift should not be found exclusively within the government – the ministers at Sainte-Adresse, the King at his headquarters in De Panne – but within the wider sphere of Belgian diplomats. Far from being simply executors of government policy, argues Auwers, a group of Young Turks within the foreign office began, from the early twentieth century onwards, to argue that the country should abandon its strict and passive interpretation of neutrality and pursue in Europe something akin to Leopold II's more aggressive policies in Africa.

After the German invasion, these more activist diplomats and civil servants gained in influence; their firebrand ways deemed more compatible with the increasing demands made of Belgium's international politics during wartime. Moreover, their political agenda found a willing ear with sections of the Belgian press, such as *Le XXe Siècle* and, from 1917 onwards, the London-based *L'Indépendance Belge*. In exile these diplomats, civil servants, government ministers and the press barons lived, as Belgian foreign minister Eugène Beyens wrote in 1916, 'in a vile promiscuity' (p. 70), uniting erstwhile political and professional adversaries like Jules Renkin and Henri Carton de Wiart, publicist Pierre Nothomb, press baron Fernand Neuray, the more conservative Foreign Ministry official Albert de Bassompierre and liberal diplomat Pierre Orts, in common annexationist cause. They had a hand in replacing neutral-

ist-minded (including Beyens) with more forceful and pro-annexationist diplomats and ministers, in controlling access to and/or hoodwinking the neutralist King Albert I in order to force through a more annexationist political course, and therefore in co-determining the foreign policy objectives of the first post-war Cabinet. But their victory was never complete: their annexationist aims never seemed to have convinced significant support either amongst the Belgian population or amongst the Belgian party-political and bureaucratic elites.

This in itself would be subject enough for a book. But Auwers is not content to leave it at that. Interspersing his narrative are observations about the role of Albert I in foreign policy making – which he likens to a form of 'personal diplomacy', [l]ike princes did in early modern times' (p. 93), Belgian diplomats' deviation from the First World War-era shift from 'secret' to a more open, democratic form of foreign policy formation, and the importance of the pursuit of 'honor' and the fear of 'disgrace' in diplomats' careers (p. 150). These interjections are sometimes highly relevant – especially his reading of how De Broqueville became the *de facto* gatekeeper for contacts with the neutralist King Albert. But others detract from, rather than add to, the strengths of his argument. His asides on the changing nature of diplomacy during the First World War, for example, are out of touch with contemporary debates: one would expect at least a mention of 'new diplomatic history' when Auwers discusses the state of the field in the social-cultural study of diplomacy and diplomats.

On the whole, Auwers' narrative is strongest when it focuses on the spatially and temporally bounded area of the Belgian government-in-exile. There, literally out of touch with their publics, those who argued for annexations did so with the support of an imagined Belgian audience, even when evidence from occupied Belgium showed that there was no sustained public interest in either acquiring Luxembourg territory or in antagonising the Netherlands by staking a claim to parts of two of its provinces. Even after the war, all signs suggest that the public at large was much more interested

in the issue of financial reparations than in an expanded Belgium-in-Europe. Auwers' conclusion, however, is by that time there was scarcely any real political debate on Belgian foreign policy or the position it should take at the Versailles peace talks, and that initiative had by now shifted mainly from politicians (and the King) to diplomats. Their 'coup', successful but short-lived and unable to deliver its intended results, was thus both a success and a failure.

Auwers' account often reads like an investigative report: exhaustive and formidably researched, but in constant danger of losing the plot. It adds to, rather than supplants, what we already know about Belgian international relations during the war, but largely fails to connect its narrative to a wider analysis of Sainte-Adresse political culture or the international environment in which these ideas operated and could be acted upon. But it does provide fascinating glimpses in the inner workings of Belgian international-relations-in-exile, and suggests that, in relative isolation in France, a small group of diplomats, press barons, ministers and governmental hangers-ons could slowly, but surely, gain an outsized influence on Belgium's disastrous political gamble at Versailles.

Samuël Kruizinga

MARYSA DEMOOR, CEDRIC VAN DIJCK AND
BIRGIT VAN PUymbroeck (EDS.)

The Edinburgh Companion to First World War Periodicals

Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2023, 539 p.

Until about a decade and a half ago, the difficult to preserve collections of periodicals were equally difficult and very labour-intensive to consult. At best there were clunky microfilms, at worst large, fragile volumes but in both cases hundreds of pages had to be browsed in the hope of a harvest that was not at all guaranteed. One of the consequences was that newspapers and magazines were only used to a limited extent as source material. Extensive digitization projects in recent years have largely put an end to this: now one can often consult entire collections from behind one's desk at home and in some cases even search them by

keyword. Belgium has played an exemplary role in this, certainly as far as the First World War is concerned: via the umbrella website belgianpress-fromthegreatwar.be, almost 400,000 pages from Belgian newspapers and magazines are currently accessible. The variety is enormous: clandestine and censored magazines from the occupied country, refugee press from the Belgian communities in exile in the Netherlands, France or the United Kingdom, newspapers published in the unoccupied part of the country including trench papers of the Belgian army, and camp magazines of the Belgian prisoners of war in Germany.

That exemplary role in facilitating the use of First World War periodicals has been mirrored by academic research on the press of that period: the *Edinburgh Companion to First World War Periodicals* is an achievement by Belgian academics Marysa Demoor, Cedric Van Dijck and Birgit Van Puymbroeck. They are not historians, but English-literature scholars, though all three have extensive experience in First World War research. For the contributions in their edited Companion, they called on both emerging and established scholars active in several academic disciplines: thus, in addition to historians and literary scholars, specialists in the arts also collaborated on this volume. It shows once again how First World studies has long since ceased to be the exclusive domain of historians (if it ever was), and this broadening of scholarly interest is a trend that the recent century has only reinforced.

This new Companion responds to a real need because whereas the press as a historical source for the study of the First World War is now well established, the same is much less true for periodicals as cultural artefacts in their own right. After all, the press not only played an important role in the war but also underwent many changes as a result of the conflict. It is on this rather than on the press as a source of information that the emphasis is placed. The first part of the book examines critical approaches ranging from 'materiality', through 'archives', to the role of the press in 'memory' and 'popular culture'. A second part focuses