

in diesem Zusammenhang auch nicht unbedingt „besser“ gewesen sein als die Großbritanniens. Für alle Beteiligten, inklusive der polnischen und tschechoslowakischen Exilregierungen, stand die Realpolitik im Vordergrund. Wie eingangs erwähnt, muss die Geschichte der baltischen Frage in den Beziehungen der Westalliierten während des Zweiten Weltkriegs nicht umgeschrieben werden, doch wissen wir dank Piirimäes Studie nun viel genauer darüber Bescheid.

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KASPARS ZELLIS: *Ilūziju un baiļu mašīnērija: propaganda nacistu okupētajā Latvijā: vara, mediji un sabiedrība (1941–1945)* [The Machinery of Illusion and Fear: Propaganda in Nazi-Occupied Latvia: Power, the Media and Society]. Mansards. Riga 2012. 364 pp. Ill. ISBN 9789984872674.

During their nearly century-long existence as part of the Latvian nation-state, the mass media (defined inclusively) have been either government-controlled or at least government-influenced longer than they have been “free” in the full sense of the word. Kaspar Zellis’ book is a thoroughly researched and sensibly organized study of the four World War II years when the content of Latvian media was dominated by material supplied by the propaganda institutions of the Third Reich, which in July 1941 after its invasion of the USSR, had placed the three Baltic states (together with Belarus) into a new administrative region called *Ostland*. The book is based on Zellis’ dissertation in the Faculty of History and Philosophy of the University of Latvia and is not meant to be an inclusive history of the German occupation period. Rather, it is an investigation of the “communications processes and politics” (p. 7) aimed at shaping the thinking of the civilian population of Latvia to serve the immediate and future needs of the Third Reich. The author grounds the inquiry in the theoretical literature of western “propaganda studies” – a research field that began to define itself even before World War II but grew in scope and seriousness after the war, focusing especially on the role of propaganda in buttressing the institutions of totalitarian societies (the writings of Hannah Arendt). In time, Zellis notes (p. 12), the study of “propaganda became a problem not only for the understanding of totalitarian societies but for the understanding of all modern societies.” This larger framework renders Zellis book a “case study” of how the governments of modern societies, in this case a

totalitarian society, seek to make use of available communications media to reshape “public opinion” so that it supports the policy goals of the currently dominant political elites. Such elites, especially in totalitarian states, always have the option of using pure coercion to bring society into line with regime doctrines (p. 12), but coercion may not be effective in the long term. Compliance can be strengthened by carefully crafted propaganda that aims to convert the “hearts and minds” (to use very modern terminology) of a subject population. Zellis’ study concerns itself primarily with the second option in Latvia, even though, as is well known, the German occupation regime used both coercion and propaganda. Zellis’ book is undoubtedly a pioneering work, and its thoroughness makes it unlikely that it will be superseded anytime soon given the present structure and funding of the historical sciences in Latvia.

The work is primarily analytical so that most – though decidedly not all – of the author’s observations are meant to apply to the whole four-year period. An opening chapter (pp. 11-46) on social science theory, primary and secondary sources and historiography places the study in the context of earlier and ongoing scholarship. A subsequent three-part division of the main subject seems a sensible way of organizing the sprawling source material at hand. The second chapter (pp. 47-99; the first of the three main divisions) is an inventory of the German civilian and military “institutions” that generated propaganda themselves or caused it to be generated by the mass media nominally controlled by Latvians. Here the author has the opportunity to explore the competition among the power centers of the occupation regime and the relationship between them and the subordinate Latvian institutions. Chapter three (pp. 100-176; second main division) surveys the propaganda instruments (“channels”) available to the regime: printed matter (periodicals, especially newspapers; the products of news agencies; books and brochures); the technology involving the visual arts (placards, posters, motion pictures); and the technology that was meant to be listened to (especially the all-important radio, as well as phonograph records). This section also discusses the subject of rumour and rumour-mongering, both of which appear to have been irrepressible throughout the years of the occupation regime. The fourth and longest chapter (pp. 177-324; third main division) deals with the content of propaganda, and focuses on the main themes of the occupation: Germans as liberators, the uncertain role of Latvians in the “New Europe,” and the new macro-historical narrative that the audience was supposed to believe in. A separate section in this part focuses on the creation of the images of the “enemy” – the external foe (western plutocrats, the USSR) and the internal foe (Jews, communists, communist sympathizers, and nationalists). A final section in this chapter deals with other themes that are less easily categorized but were important during the whole period: the economy, especially requisitioning, and the obligatory nature of work; wartime austerity; the refugee question; partisan

activity; the “Year of Terror” (*Baigais Gads*, i.e. 1940–41, the first year of the Soviet occupation); the Latvian Legion and the accomplishments of Latvian soldiers; and the recurring question of Latvian state sovereignty. Zellis notes (pp. 181–182) that over the four-year period during which German propaganda was being actively created and promulgated, its content was event-sensitive, depending in large part on the outcomes of specific German campaigns on the eastern front. Thus, for example, German propagandists understood that there was a significant correlation between the intensity of Latvian support of the war against the USSR and the idea of the restoration of an independent Latvian state. As a consequence, by 1944 when defeat was looming in the east, German power-wielders became much more willing to engage Latvian intermediaries in discussions of the important role that some kind of Latvian state-formation would have in the future, though specifics, as always, were left vague.

The author makes it clear that the wide array of available propaganda instruments and usable subjects permitted the occupation government to adapt to circumstances fairly well. All instruments were used at one time or another as were the main themes: some were deemed more effective and some less so, depending on the situation. A steady flow of secret reports prepared by the *Sicherheitsdienst* and other security organs (p. 183) reported in detail how the public reacted to various propaganda “actions.” Periodical publications, especially newspapers such as *Tēvija* – the flagship paper – and the radio dominated throughout, the former with especially large print runs in spite of continuous paper shortages. German propaganda wanted to make sure that Latvians understood that their pre-war government (especially the authoritarian regime of Kārlis Ulmanis) had betrayed them (p. 187), and that they could look forward to a brighter future only as part of the German-dominated world order. For images of Soviet bestiality, propagandists made wide use of the 1940–41 Soviet occupation year, which with its destruction of the Latvian political elite, imprisonments, random executions, and mass deportations was a living memory among Latvian adults and thus ready-made for propagandistic exploitation. The “Year of Terror” provided short-term credence to the theme of “Germans-as-liberators” and continued to be useful in 1943 to keep young men from avoiding conscription in the Latvian Legion. Latvians did not need to stretch their imagination to believe that the USSR was their main “external” enemy; western allies – primarily England and the USA, portrayed by propagandists as dominated by “Jewish plutocrats” – took a very poor second place in the “external enemy” competition (pp. 261–265). Among “internal enemies,” Jews, of course, stood at the top of the list of groups to be subjected to “dehumanization” and extermination (pp. 225–257), followed by communist sympathizers who had not fled to the USSR when the Germans arrived, people who had benefitted by Soviet agrarian “reforms” of the “Year of Terror,” Latvians who demonstrated too much interest in

the interwar period and argued openly for the restoration of some kind of Latvian national sovereignty. One could become an “internal enemy” even without belonging to these groupings simply by participating in the diffusion of rumours about eventual German defeat, by hiding requisitioned foodstuffs, by showing insufficient deference to strutting German officials. Zellis notes that one function of propaganda had been to induce (pp. 20-21) “behavioral models” in the civilian population that would make events appear to be self-generated rather than merely the results of propaganda “actions.” In the Latvian case, this did not work out very well: the earlier twenty years of independence remained a stumbling block in the minds of Latvian adults and even in the thinking of younger people, who had matured in these interwar decades.

To be credible among Latvians, written and spoken propaganda had to be delivered to them in their native language, unaccented, colloquial, and grammatically correct. The need for native Latvian journalists and other writers who were willing to become propagandists was met very early in the occupation, when newspapers and magazines proliferated (Table 1, pp. 111-112; Table 2, pp. 123-124) and created employment for editors, feature writers, and various kinds of “news” reporters. Many Latvians who wrote and worked for these publications were rank amateurs, but a considerable number were professionals with journalistic experience from the interwar period. Their sorry task now was to create publications in which space was shared by government pronouncements (which often had to be published verbatim), feature stories that reflected the propaganda lines of the regime, local news, and belletristica judged to be innocuous by the German censors but provided a way for Latvian authors to continue their writing and publishing. The motivation of the Latvian authors who apparently readily replicated in their columns and editorials the occupiers’ party line (especially blatantly and poisonously anti-Semitic images) requires further explanation, but Zellis does not try to do so here. The question of whether Latvian participation was rooted in heartfelt conviction, sheer opportunism, or other factors thus remains open. Zellis also spends some time in relating the provincial publications to central news sources, and all of these to the German news agencies that provided much of the material. Here it is important to remember that the Latvian public during the German occupation years (and, of course, during the earlier “Year of Terror” under Soviet rule) had almost no opportunity to learn about the external world from alternate sources. This situation magnified the importance of “official” information and also gave rise to fanciful rumours about domestic and international events. Rumour, especially when rooted in wishful thinking, had great staying power. Thus, for example, until the very end of the war in May 1945, many Latvians remained convinced that the western allies would turn on the Soviet Union, expel it from the Baltic region, and allow Latvia to regain independence. Aware of this rumour, propagandists

battled it with articles about the perfidy of “western Jewish plutocrats” and at least one famous placard (“The Swedes are coming,” p. 305), but to no avail. This particular rumour remained lodged in the thinking of many of those Latvians who during 1944–45 left their homeland to begin what turned out to be a half-century of exile in the west.

This example raises the very basic questions of how deeply the propogandized images and ideas became embedded in the thinking of the targeted Latvian audience and what proportion of the target population did propaganda reach. Zellis arrives at this question several times in his discussion (pp. 174, 187, 329–330) but wisely observes at one point that “historically, an evaluation of the effectiveness of propaganda is problematic. In principle, it is impossible to evaluate its influence by using empirical facts” (p. 187). In this respect, the Latvian case remains particularly murky, with long-term influences having to be inferred. It is possible to argue, on the one hand, that by July 1941 many sectors of the Latvian listening and reading public had become quite cynical about what they read and heard in any mass media. After all, during the six years of the Ulmanis regime, the Latvian media practiced self-censorship and during 1940–41 what was printed and heard were simply variations of the same Communist “party line.” Information from “official” sources of any kind was bound to be suspect. On the other hand, during the German occupation, the public domain was literally inundated with Nazi-sponsored images and claims, newspaper and periodical runs were large, the radio repeated the occupiers’ message, motion pictures offered only escapism, and for most people the sources of alternate interpretations of reality remained scarce. Some elements of the *Weltanschauung* that propaganda was meant to impose must have been lodged in the audience’s thinking. Until a research technique is found to reach the “hearts and minds” of past populations, however, conditional propositions of the *must have been* variety will have to remain untested. In his close examination of propaganda content, Zellis repeatedly emphasises the factors that may have stood in the way of Latvians becoming “believers”: favourable personal memories of the interwar period of independence, the refusal of German authorities to seriously contemplate the renewal of Latvian independence of some kind, the continual use of naked coercion alongside propagandistic persuasion, the long-held image of “Germans” as the “traditional enemy.” The question of effectiveness thus puts itself forward as the next step in the examination of this four-year chapter in the history of Latvian information space.

Scholars who continue to seek understanding of the World War II period in Latvian history have every reason to be grateful to Kaspars Zellis for this altogether exceptional book, and to the publisher *Mansards* for an intellectually and visually satisfying presentation of Zellis’ suggestive analysis.

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