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Politics of humour in extremis: Cabaret and propaganda in the Netherlands during the Second World War

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Abstract

This article examines politicized humour in totalitarian regimes by conducting an analysis of the radio programme 'Zondagmiddagcabaret van Paulus de Ruiter' ('Sunday Afternoon Cabaret by Paulus de Ruiter'), which was aired between 1941 and 1943 in the Netherlands under German occupation. The radio programme in the occupied Netherlands is exceptional in that it was explicitly designed as a 'political cabaret', whereas propaganda in Nazi Germany generally aimed to indirectly influence the audience through so-called light entertainment. The focus on dramaturgies of humorous strategies and on Althusser's concept of interpellation allows for a distinction of different scenes of interpellation as staged by the 'Sunday Afternoon Cabaret'. Even though the study of National Socialist programmes can be distressing for both the researcher and the reader, the aim is to analyse the workings of humour without necessarily characterizing humorous strategies in terms of 'good' or 'bad', but instead paying attention to the way humour works on socio-political imaginaries. During the first period of the broadcast, the ambivalent character of humour aimed at shifting ideological frames, to redefine socio-political imaginaries. Later on, the performed dramaturgy of humour redefined the scene of interpellation as a scene of exclusive racial national identity, even before the German National Socialist authorities started to implement measures for the persecution and annihilation of Jewish citizens in the Netherlands at the beginning of 1942.

Keywords

Dramaturgies of interpellation, dramaturgy of humour, humour and propaganda, ideology, politics and cabaret, totalitarianism

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Authoritarian or totalitarian regimes are usually considered to be hostile towards manifestations of humour. Scholars have time and again referred to Bakhtin's (1986) notion that 'only dogmatic and authoritarian cultures are one-sidedly serious. Violence does not know laughter' (p. 134). Thus, humorous expressions in totalitarian regimes are generally analysed as a mode of resistance (Al-Rawi, 2016; Merziger, 2007; Üngör and Verkerke, 2015). In recent years, the liberating and critical nature of humour has been questioned by several scholars, by emphasizing the dialectics of a rebellious and disciplining nature of humour (Billig, 2005), elaborating on how power relations are reinforced (Kuipers, 2011) or focusing on the political implications of humorous aesthetics (Holm, 2017). Nevertheless, almost all studies investigate humour vis-à-vis state power or heteronormative political structures, that is to say they focus on the way humour works as a critical, liberating or re-affirming modus in relation to democratic governance and policymaking.

In contrast, studies on humour conducted and/or facilitated by totalitarian regimes, like Polimenova's and Tillier's (2019) contribution on the House of Humour in Bulgaria during the communist era or Monika Pater's (2012) chapter on 'Light Radio Entertainment during National Socialism', are relatively scarce. To shed light on the politics of humour as employed by a totalitarian regime, I will analyse the 'Zondagmiddagcabaret van Paulus de Ruiter' ('Sunday Afternoon Cabaret by Paulus de Ruiter'), which was broadcast between October 1941 and December 1943 in the Netherlands under German occupation. This case study is exceptional in at least two respects: first, in contrast to Nazi Germany, where one of the propagandistic aims was to indirectly influence the audience through 'light entertainment', the radio programme in the occupied Netherlands was explicitly conceptualized as 'political cabaret', through which humour was understood as effective means to win the masses for the cause of National Socialism; second, most of the articles and even some records are available and thus allow for a close reading of the radio programme. However, the following discussion of the case study does not aim at an historical reconstruction of the radio programme but at an exemplary investigation into humour as means to shift socio-political and ideological imaginaries.

Methodologically, I will approach the case study through a dramaturgical analysis on the one hand (Bala and Zangl, 2015) and cultural analysis on the other. Especially, Althusser's concept of interpellation will allow for a critical analysis of humorous strategies as performed by the radio programme. By analysing both the aesthetic organizations of the programme (dramaturgy) and the way socio-political imaginaries are addressed, shifted and restructured, the study of a historical example intends to shed light on contemporary socio-political changes. As political movements in recent years show, shifting socio-political imaginaries often imply a 'war on facts' or a power struggle over the sovereignty of interpretation of 'reality'. As I will argue, especially in times of socio-political transitions, humour is used as a strategy to 'counter-frame' existing socio-political imaginaries, independently of ideological preferences.

In his seminal study on laughter, Henri Bergson states that laughter is always 'the laughter of a group' (Bergson, 1956: 64) towards a person who does not conform to the norms of the group. Bergson subsequently investigates individual characteristics that are understood as unsociable and thus ridiculous in relation to a social norm. My article, however, starts from the question of how and in what way humour contributes to shifting

social norms or discourses to re-frame individuals and individual characteristics as unsociable and laughable. That humour qualifies as a political or propagandistic tool to shift ideological imaginaries can be derived already by considering humour as a part of rhetorical culture, and as a means of changing cognitive templates (Critchley, 2002; Kayam et al., 2014: 1–7). However, to explore the correlation between changing 'cognitive templates' and processes of subjectivation, Étienne Balibar's reading of Althusser's critique of ideology is pertinent here as it allows for an analysis of the dramaturgical mode of interpellation or – in Holm's phrasing – how humour as an aesthetic mode intervenes 'into the sensory co-ordinates of the status quo which effects a re-distribution and re-apportioning of identities, subjects, spaces and times' (Holm, 2017: 188). In his article on 'Althusser's Dramaturgy and the Critique of Ideology', Balibar (2015) considers the possibility of an 'interpellation out of ideology' (p. 9) by applying a dramaturgy of disruption and dislocation. Such a dramaturgical structure 'paradoxically [makes] 'visible' or 'perceptible' what is in principle invisible, namely, ideology's grip on the consciousnesses of its subjects' (p. 6). Obviously, National Socialist politics did not aim at a critical approach towards ideology, but they did aim at radically shifting ideological imaginaries. What is at stake in the context of the Netherlands under German occupation is to grasp how exactly National Socialist cultural politics deployed humour as a means of working upon the imaginary of the masses. As I will elaborate in the following, the 'Sunday Afternoon Cabaret' performed a complex repertoire of humour to destabilize, transform and appropriate ideological frames of understanding by applying different modes of interpellation to signify 'bad subjects', 'countersubjects' and 'non-subjects'.

Occupying the scene

Before the occupation of the Netherlands on 10 May 1940, the Dutch parliament consisted of 10 different parties (several Christian parties, liberal parties, socialist parties, the communist party and the N.S.B., the National Socialist Movement in the Netherlands) and thus represented a potentially polarized political landscape. After the occupation, the National Socialist German authorities reorganized governmental and state institutions according to policies of *Gleichschaltung*, with the aim to stabilize the various perspectives on the future role of the Netherlands.[1] Under the changed conditions of Politics, understood in terms of repressive state apparatuses, the diversified field of politics, understood as field of (conflicting) ideologies (cf. Althusser, 2014: 247–249), underwent a transformation too. Resistance groups and opponents of the new regime found themselves facing a common enemy and related themselves to the absent Queen and/or the Dutch government in exile. To stabilize this ideological minefield, the occupying power had to adopt a multi-layered framework of measures: from numerous laws and regulations, reorganizing the administration, to the control of the (mass) media.

Before the war, the radio organization in the Netherlands was compartmentalized according to the main ideological pillars of the country: liberals, Protestants, Roman Catholics, Socialists and the liberal Protestants each had their own radio station. Briefly, after the occupation of the Netherlands, the Germans started to consolidate the 'pillared' Dutch radio, a process which was finalized in April 1941. Like in Germany, radio was meant to play an important propagandistic part in the Nazification of the Netherlands

(Hogenkamp, de Leeuw, and Wijfjes, 2012: 68).[2] According to minutes of the so-called propaganda council, it seems to have been clear that the acceptance of National Socialist policies might be better conveyed by way of light entertainment than by straightforward propaganda (Niod 102/2152, Minutes 30 October 1941). This understanding of propaganda is perfectly in line with Joseph Goebbels' well-known propagandistic policies which gave priority to 'diversion and entertainment' (Pater, 2012: 108). In her analysis of a highly popular variety show on radio in Germany, Pater states that '[t]he entertainment programs, as well as the overall program schedule, supported the withdrawal into the private, seemingly apolitical space of home and family. It thereby contributed to the acquiescence and stability of National Socialism'. (p. 123) The significance of so-called light entertainment becomes obvious in view of the considerable amount of revue and cabaret programmes, which in fact increased each year from 1941 to 1944 (Verkijk, 1974: 583). Next to light entertainment the large proportion of music programmes, which covered, like in the prewar years, 60–70 percent of the broadcasting schedule (Hogenkamp, de Leeuw, and Wijfjes, 2012: 86) supported the 'withdrawal into the private' and a sense of stability. Therefore, the radio programming can be understood as an attempt to reconcile the Dutch audience with the 'new order' or as Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) state in their eminent essay on culture industry: 'Laughter, whether reconciled or terrible, always accompanies the moment when a fear is ended. [. . .] Reconciled laughter resounds with the echo of escape from power [. . .]. It echoes the inescapability of power' (p. 112).

However, next to these allegedly apolitical formats, the boards of the broadcast planned an explicitly political cabaret which started on 19 October 1941 under the title 'Zondagmiddagcabaret van Paulus de Ruiter' ('Sunday Afternoon Cabaret by Paulus de Ruiter'). Chief editor and co-writer of the programme was Jacques van Tol, a well-known writer for cabaret and revues in the Netherlands during the 1930s. Although the programme was assigned to the department of Light music and cabaret it can be linked to propaganda campaigns as formulated by the programme council of the Department of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda in October and November 1941: 'With Germany against capitalism', 'With Germany for a New Europe', 'With Germany for a free Netherlands', or 'With Germany against Bolshevism' (Niod 102/2152, Minutes 16 October 1941, 6 November 1941).

Despite the close link to political propaganda aims, terms like National-Socialism or N.S.B. were hardly used during the 2 years of its existence; the programme was nevertheless decidedly propagandistic in several aspects. Jacques van Tol had clearly found a formula which perfectly fulfilled the requirements of entertaining propaganda when it comes to politics working upon the imagination of the masses. During its existence, the main targets of humour (and propaganda) of the political cabaret were the so-called anti's (opponents of the occupying regime), the Dutch government in London exile and especially its broadcaster Radio Oranje, the British government/military forces and the allied forces in general, and finally the Jewish population of the Netherlands.

Setting the scene for political humour

Already the name of the programme implies one of the main targets of propaganda, the British government and its military forces. De Ruiter refers to the iconic Dutch naval

hero Michiel de Ruyter who successfully fought against the British army during the three Anglo-Dutch wars in the 17th century. The combination of the heroic (de Ruiter) and the comic (cabaret) sets the scene for the self-confident gesture which characterizes the manuscripts of the political cabaret. Paulus the Ruiter was one of the pseudonyms Jacques van Tol used as (song)writer (Verkijk, 1974: 594). Van Tol wrote most of the song texts of the well-known Dutch Jewish revue artist Louis Davids. The manuscripts of the 'Sunday Afternoon Cabaret' list van Tol regularly as writer of the texts, but he stays invisible in the actual broadcast. Also the conférenciers – performed by Bartoes (pseud. of A. J. Wytsma) and M. A. L. Tummers – did not refer to or represent the voice of Paulus de Ruiter; their task was reduced to briefly introduce the individual parts of the programme. As I will discuss later, the invisibility or the emptiness behind the eponymous author ('by Paulus de Ruiter') of the political cabaret plays an important part in the dramaturgy of the programme.

In general, the structure of the political cabaret complies with the characteristics of vaudeville: a serial format, fixed time, recurring characters and recognizable signature tunes (Pater, 2012: 118).[3] In accordance with the vaudeville format the political cabaret consisted of a combination of songs, declamations and sketches alternating with instrumental music. Thus, the dramaturgy of the programme activated different aesthetic frames which allowed for contrast, sublation, reversal or intensification of the implied messages. Comic in a strict sense was primarily the sketches and the tunes at the beginning and end of the show. Humorous in a broader sense was the songs and poems in between as they often implied an ironic or sarcastic twist to convey a moralistic or political message.

Only after a few weeks of varying setups, the political cabaret obtained a clear and recognizable structure for its listener. The search for an effective mix of explicit political messages and humorous approaches to transform public imaginaries becomes evident when recalling the various opening jingles. During the first weeks, the programme started with 'cabaret music', but on 2 November 1941, the manuscript indicates the following 'signal': 'Wake up! Wake up!/And don't sit around dreaming./The time has come!/Wake up!' (NIOD 103, SaCPdR 3908).[4] Although the 'signal' can be related to the 'new order' of the National Socialists, it equally references Bach's famous cantata 'Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme' ('Awake, calls the voice to us') or to a certain extent to the first line of 'The Internationale', the song of the socialist movement. Thus, the words appealed to a broad spectrum of the population, from the various Christian parties to the Socialist party. However, the 'signal' could potentially also stimulate resistance – which might be the reason why it was used only once. The permanent opening tune of the political cabaret became a song entitled 'Why doesn't the washing hang on the Siegfried line'. It is a parody of the British soldier song 'We're Gonna Hang Out The Washing On The Siegfried Line' written in 1939 by the songwriter Jimmy Kennedy, which in turn ridiculed the German army. The sarcastic appropriation and/or inversion of well-known songs and poems of the enemy or opponent belongs to the standard repertoire of humorous practices which can be detected throughout the programme. The opening tune, as mocking adaptation of the ironic song of the British army, deployed the basic elements of the depreciatory depiction of the British government and the British army. As long as the National Socialists were on the winning side of the war, the strategy of

ridiculing and belittling the allied forces in general and the British army in particular seems to have guaranteed the success of the cabaret. But above all the implied counter-propaganda of the beginning tune can be regarded as part of the 'war on facts' conducted throughout the political cabaret.

Destabilizing socio-political imaginaries

A central role in destabilizing the perception of 'reality' was given to the sketches of the comic duo called Keuvel (chatterer) and Klessebes (gossip-monger). They are depicted as two petit bourgeois who naively and frantically believe in the 'rumours' spread by 'the station', that is, Radio Oranje, the broadcast of the London exile government. Their dialogues not only render rumours as grotesque but allow for addressing opponents as 'bad subjects' or, as I will elaborate later, as 'countersubjects'.

On 9 November 1941, Klessebes naively asks Keuvel: 'Germany has actually declared war on England, hasn't it?' Keuvel answers that in a way England was just 1 day earlier in doing so. Klessebes does not understand how it is possible that England as democratic country could have declared war since 'a democracy is only for peace'. Subsequently, she asks the same question about America. Keuvel explains that America has declared war because Hitler has taken away from America its colonies whereupon he asks if she has not heard of Columbus. Klessebes answers: 'Yes yes! Doesn't he deal in black-market eggs?' Keuvel explains: 'Certainly not, madam. That was a discoverer. He discovered Europe. Don't you know from school? Salomon Columbus discovered Europe. But the Germans have taken it away again, because of racial hatred. See?' What follows is a grotesque depiction of America's fight against racial hatred caused by Black Americans who do not want to 'sit with an American in one tram' (Niod 103, SaCPdR 3958a). The humorous strategy of progressively built turns and twists which repeatedly recast and shift utterances, is characteristic of the sketches of Keuvel and Klessebes. On one hand, sentiments and dissenting voices are explicitly presented in order to ridicule and belittle so-called anti's. But even more important than addressing the opponent as 'bad subjects' (Althusser, 2014: 269), that is, subjects who misunderstand or refuse the interpellation, is the strategy of exaggerating alleged ambivalences (democracies meant to minister peace declare war), of seemingly naively twisting historical facts (who declared war against whom) and by the inversion of racist politics. The punchlines of the sketch take so many shifts that it is impossible to grasp the meaning it seeks to carry. The punchline is based on the misidentification of Christopher Columbus with Salomon Columbus and on replacing the discovery of America with the discovery of Europe, which allows for a reframing of 'racial hatred'. For a moment, racial hatred is established as fait accompli, but turns into an offence against America in the following passage. The appreciation of America as a nation fighting against racial hatred grotesquely reverses facts by show-casing Black Americans as agents of racial hatred. The twisted juxtaposition of German Anti-Semitism and American racism results in multi-layered and conflicting ways of understanding. Due to the grotesque reversal, America is exposed as hypocritical with regard to 'racial hatred', but if Black Americans obviously are not the agents of racist politics in America, what does this imply for Anti-Semitism in Germany? These shifting meanings as the effect of the accumulating punchlines are not primarily

meant to expose contradiction but to destabilize socio-political imaginaries and public opinions, especially with regard to democratic governance and national identity. The sketch thereby meets anti-democratic and anti-Semitic propaganda aims as demanded by the Department of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda in late 1941.

In her study on the ‘Sunday Afternoon Cabaret’, Maaike Wermer (2001) draws the conclusion that next to anti-allied propaganda, anti-Dutch propaganda was characteristic for the broadcast (p. 11). The term ‘anti-Dutch’ is somewhat misleading, though, since it does not distinguish between opponents of the occupying forces, the Dutch government in exile, the Dutch broadcast in exile or criticism of a capitalist attitude as a supposedly typical Dutch trait. At stake is not ‘anti-Dutch’ propaganda but problematizing and reshaping conceptions of Dutch national identity. During the first weeks in fact all parts of the political cabaret dealt with the issue. The key figures throughout the whole period of its existence were Keuvel and Klessebes. The sketches ridicule opponents as petit bourgeois by depreciating acts of resistance to the coded greeting ‘baby carrot above’ (Worteltje boven), a contortion of the famous folk song ‘Oranje boven’ (‘Baby carrot’ thus is the code for Oranje, i.e. the royal family) or the use of code language like I-A (Iedereen afwachten/everybody has to wait; thus mimicking the bray of donkeys). The ‘anti’s’ are exposed as hypocritical, egoistic, and opportunistic citizens, calling for resistance but enriching themselves at the expense of others, that is, proponents of the regime. Thus, the comic duo demonstrates ex negativo the righteousness of National Socialist principles and the ‘new order’.

Whereas Keuvel and Klessebes are the personalized projection surface of the ‘bad subject’, the question of ‘national identity’ and appropriate subjection permeates most songs and poems. On 2 November 1941, a song in support of the so-called winter relief action depicts a number of petit bourgeois who refuse to donate in order to demonstrate opposition. The song ends with:

> They don’t give a penny, / They don’t give a cent, / That’s how you can show / How anti you are. / Yes . . . anti what actually? / They struggle with that, / They’re more preserving, / Pro-portemonnaie! [. . .] The poorest they are waiting . . . / Come on, care for them! / Whatever your pro or / Your anti may be! / The suffering of your neighbour, / Who lacks everything, / That is something with which you / simply don’t demonstrate! (Niod 103, SaCPdR 3908)

While the ‘winter relief song’ approaches the theme ‘compassion with the poor’ sarcastically, the next song entitled ‘The abandoned one’ is straightforwardly melodramatic. It depicts a righteous Dutch man who ends up at the margins of society due to unemployment. The song ends as follows: ‘And nobody said: it is barbaric! / And nobody who went on strike for him. / [. . .] No one dissolved with pity, / (Like one does now for another) / Quietly, he hungered and waited. . . / Yet, he too was a Dutchman!’ (Niod 103, SaCPdR 3908). To bring up the ‘new order’ directly, like in the line ‘Like one does now for another’ is unusual. The fact that the line is bracketed (at least in the manuscript) underlines its exceptionality even more. By contrast, deviations of social norms, labelled in terms of war profiteers, clandestine trade or minor offences, are dealt with very explicitly, as for example in the song ‘Hallo, hallo! . . . You are speaking to Sluik the Slaughterer’ (‘Sluik’ can be read as an abbreviation of Smuggler). ‘Hallo, hallo!’ follows

the cheerful melody of 'Tout va bien, Madam la Marquise', a then famous song by Ray Ventura, composed in 1930.[5] The original song stages an aristocratic woman on holiday who calls her servant to find out if everything is alright. The servant recounts a series of catastrophes, from a dead horse to the suicide of her husband, but ends each stanza invariably with the comforting line that everything is fine. During the first years of the Second World War the song mockingly referred to the head in the sand attitude of France (Harriss, 2018: 91). However, the adaptation of the song by the 'Sunday Afternoon Cabaret' particularly responds to the parody of the song aired by the Watergeus, the cabaret programme of Radio Oranje, in March 1941. In this version, Mussert (head of the N.S.B.) requests information about the implementation of N.S.B. policies from the heads of various N.S.B. institutions. Time and again he has to acknowledge that the new policies concerning employment, agriculture, culture, etc. are not succeeding in attracting the Dutch people (Schenk and Mos, 1975: 220). Thus, the Watergeus variation moves the mechanism of self-delusion from the servant to the new political powers.

'Sluik the Slaughterer', the version of the song by the 'Sunday Afternoon Cabaret', refrains from the characteristic self-delusional attitude which activates the ambivalent quality of humour in the original song or in the Watergeus version. 'Sluik the Slaughterer' very consciously sells clandestine rotten meat and fraudulent sausages and praises himself as being 'successful as foul rapist of law' who 'cares for himself and not for the country' (Niod 103, SaCPdR 3908). 'Sluik the Slaughterer' bluntly ascertains the abnormality of the situation, which he generously exploits to his own advantage. The revised version obviously counter-frames the Mussert version of the Watergeus. It is not the self-deception of the department heads that is abnormal, but the acts of selfish, capitalist behaviour represented by Sluik the Slaughterer that create an abnormality. Thus, the workers, farmers and Dutch people in general opposing National Socialist policies in the Watergeus version are merged to the stereotype of selfish war profiteer in the version of the political cabaret.

To a great extent, the humorous strategy of the 'Sunday Afternoon Cabaret' consisted in singling out opponents of the 'new order' by way of stereotyping corrupt, deviant and self-centred subjects like Keuvel and Klessebes or Sluik the Slaughterer. At least in circles close to the N.S.B. the strategies seem to have worked. On 1 May 1942, the weekly journal of the N.S.B. *Volk en vaderland (People and Fatherland)* reports an annoying incident at a police station by running the headline 'Sluik the Slaughterer on holiday', indicating the exuberant meals a convicted slaughterer shared with the police officers and his family during the time of his imprisonment (p. 2). But especially Keuvel and Klessebes seem to have become proverbial figures. On 4 December 1941, one of the controllers of the radio-inspections reports:

> N.S.B. district leader [Kringleider] Kruimink, head teacher, addressed one of his students, who was talking, as 'Miss Klessebes'. The whole class responded immediately by giggling and exclamations of 'Mr. Keuvel' followed. It was clear to him that nearly all listened. (Niod, 102/1983)

This seemingly innocent scene illustrates the mechanism of interpellation based on humour: it subjectivizes individuals as deviant subjects, whereby laughter renders visible who is part of the game and who is not.

How are subjects addressed or interpellated by the ‘Sunday afternoon cabaret’? In her contribution on ‘Althusser’s Materialist Theater’ Banu Bargu (2015) discusses Althusser’s famous scene of interpellation illustrating the ‘constitution of the subject by the act of turning around to the police hail “Hey, you there!”’ (p. 96). In order to develop a theory of the ‘bad subject’, i.e. a passenger who is *not* turning around, Bargu distinguishes between two possibilities: the failure of interpellation is due to misrecognition (not hearing the hail) or refusal. According to Bargu,

> [i]t is more likely that a ‘bad subject’ in the former sense is a failed subject, a not-yet subject, a nonsubject – not captured by that particular hail – whereas the latter is a ‘bad subject’ understood in the sense of a *countersubject*, a subject of disobedience and resistance. (p. 98)

Subsequently, she links the notion of countersubjects to the concept of ‘a layered subjectivity’, which allows for ‘countersubjectivations that result from the encounter with oppositional discourses, practices, and institutions that are embodiments of oppositional ideologies [. . .]’ (p. 99). The shift from one ideology to another ideology, whether blindly or intended as emancipatory or critical, can be understood, according to Bargu,

> as a partly unconscious process of the becoming-dominant of a countersubjectivation among many subjectivations that are sedimented in the layered subject, activated, on one hand, by different interpellating encounters, experiences, practices of struggle and, on the other, by a partly conscious internal struggle with the contradictions in the whole of each subjective formation. (p. 101)

Bargu’s concept of layered subjectivity allows us to approach the various strands of ideology addressed by the ‘Sunday Afternoon Cabaret’ in a more nuanced manner. Based on her differentiation, the structure of interpellation in most parts of the programme of the ‘Sunday Afternoon Cabaret’ can be characterized as oscillating between addressing opponents as ‘failed subjects’ and ‘countersubjects’ struggling with conflicting ideologies. The focus on compassion, anti-capitalism and nationalism refers to various Christian, humanistic and socialist ideological sediments. The combination of comedy (sketches), irony and pathos (songs) invokes the various ideological practices to enact them as part of the National Socialist ideological practice. The dramaturgy of the ‘Sunday Afternoon Cabaret’ can be described as a structure of disruption and appropriation, that is, disrupting ‘old’ ideological layers to re-inscribe them in the ‘new political order’. During the first weeks of the programme, the exposed ‘countersubjects’ hold the possibility of becoming ‘failed subjects’ of the upcoming dominant ideology.

Preparing for racial extinction

In the course of 1942, the dramaturgy of the political cabaret changed insofar as the various parts of the programmes started to establish conflicting contrasts instead of oscillating layers of ideological signification. Self-conscious, activist and mobilizing songs and poems replace the rather cautious and indirect reference to ideological norms. Rumours spread by so-called anti’s are not so much staged as a battle for the prerogative of interpretation concerning facts, as they are reframed as gossip, ludicrous but hardly worth noticing. It is especially the contrast between invoking a positive National Socialist

identity and the increasingly anti-Semitic parts of the programme which redefine the workings of inclusion and exclusion. That does not mean that anti-Semitic references were absent during the first months of the political programme, but anti-Semitism was not the backbone of its dramaturgy. The study of National Socialist programmes is undoubtedly distressing, and for this reason, I would like to emphasize that the following close-reading aims to expose the ways in which humour works on socio-political imaginaries.

A typical example for the shift of attention (or rather the shift of attack) is the text accompanying a popular serenade by the Dutch composer Jonny Heykens. In March 1941, the piece of music has already been used for a satirical song by the Watergeus (Radio Oranje) including the following lines:

> At the corner of the street stands a member of the N.S.B.
>
> It's not a man, it's not a woman, it's a Pharisee,
>
> With a newspaper in his hand, he is peddling there.
>
> He sells his fatherland for five loose cents. (Schenk and Mos, 1975: 237)

On 2 November 1941, the political cabaret 'answered' with a version ridiculing the opponents.

> At the corner of the street stands a Dutchman,
>
> Gets all worked up, gets angry, gossips with another.
>
> Early in the morning, late at night, they stand together,
>
> As dumb and foolish as a child, until England wins. (Niod 103, SaCPdR 3908a)

Even though the version of the political cabaret includes an anti-Semitic strophe – 'At the corner there stands Moos at his cart with fruits, / Together with Saar and Roos he secretly whispers rumors' (Niod 103, SaCPdR 3908a) – the focus lies on depicting anti's as foolish. By contrast, the version broadcast on 15 March 1942 is thoroughly anti-Semitic by juxtaposing a 'corrupt Dutch Jewish man' (Bram Cardozo) with the image of an upright member of the N.S.B, which simultaneously rewrites the first strophe of the Watergeus version.

> At the corner of the street, there stands Bram Cardozo
>
> When his friend Moos passes by, he shouts, drooling, OZO!
>
> Bram stands there with merchandise – distribution vouchers.
>
> And in no time he has again made a lot of money.
>
> [. . .] At the corner of the street, there stands a man with newspapers
>
> He does not earn a cent from his many customers
>
> He stands for Country and People, he is a man and a father
>
> And yet the Jewish clique scolds *him* a traitor of his country. (Niod 103, SaCPdR 1225)

However, the explicit turn to anti-Semitic propaganda had started already in February 1942 and can be related to the policy of the persecution and destruction of Jewish citizens, starting in February 1942 with the creation of a Ghetto in Amsterdam, the introduction of the so-called yellow star on 3 May 1942 and the beginning of the deportations from Westerbork to Sobibor and Auschwitz in July 1942. In accordance with the various measures, the political cabaret seems to prepare the ideological landscape by time and again contrasting the image of the 'honest Dutchman' and the 'corrupt Jews'. In the course of this anti-Semitic shift, a part of the depreciative characteristics of opponents of the regime in general is increasingly concentrated in the image of the Jew.

On 1 February 1942, the programme starts with a song called 'Start building-up!' with the recurring refrain: 'For peace, for a better time, / Comrade, get to work, take on the struggle! / Hark! People and State call you. / Start building-up, comrade!' (Niod 103, SaCPdR 549). Subsequently, the famous song 'Lily Marleen' is transformed into a song denigrating opponents, the Russian and British military forces, and one strophe is formulated as both a deprecation of and warning to Jewish people. 'In front of the British station / stands a fat Jew, / Eats from misery / Parasite bread. / But when the time of peace has come, / The Jew will go to the Ghetto! / Watch out, Lily Marleen! / Watch out, Lily Marleen!' (Niod 103, SaCPdR 549) The reference to the 'British station' (i.e. Radio Oranje) makes clear that the revised version is also a response to the adaptation of the song 'Lili Marleen' by the Watergeus. However, more important here is the fact that the Jewish ghetto is already mentioned in the political cabaret before the ghetto in Amsterdam actually existed. The same is true for the introduction of the so-called yellow star. Even though the yellow star had already been imposed on Jews in Germany, in the Netherlands this measure was only taken in May 1942. Nevertheless, on 1 February 1942, we find the following dialogue in the sketch of Keuvel and Klessebes: 'Keuvel: Soon all donkeys – I mean all I-A people, will receive an order of chivalry as a reward. [. . .] A special order: The Star of David with the garlic leaves'. Klessebes is excited and naively asks Mister Keuvel what the six points of the Star of David actually designate. His answer is as follows: 'One point for the hoarders, one for the profiteers, one for the writers of threatening letters, one for the grumbler, one for the saboteur, and one for the donkeys in general' (Niod 103, SaCPdR 549). As mentioned earlier, the opponents are satirized by greeting each other with 'I-A'. Thus, when one of the star points refers to 'donkeys in general', the opponents are identified as Jewish throughout. Despite or rather precisely because of the connotation of Dutch opponents as Jewish, the distinction between Jewish and Dutch identity becomes more and more marked.

One of the culminations of anti-Semitism is to be found in the broadcast on 15 March 1942. Till today the ineffably blunt anti-Semitic adaptation of the popular song by Louis Davids 'Dat is de kleine man' ('That is the common man') is invoked in order to characterize the 'Sunday Afternoon Cabaret'. However, weeks of debate over the legitimacy of broadcasting a 'Jewish song', even if it was satirical, preceded the bluntly anti-Semitic version. In the end, the whole discussion revolved around the question of authorship which, as I will argue, related to 'the position of the transcendent, interpellating Subject' (Bargu, 2015: 87). The question to be settled was whether Louis Davids, the popular Jewish Dutch revue artist, or Jacques van Tol, co-author and director of the political cabaret, was the author of the song. It is of interest that it took weeks before the names are enunciated. On

February 15, in anticipation of possible criticism, a first version of the song was announced by Bartoes, the conférencier, as follows: 'They said: You can't possibly broadcast that? This is Yiddish cabaret art, isn't it? The man of that song [Louis Davids, who is not mentioned by name] has made it himself?' Well, the conférencier remarks, insiders know better (Niod 103, SaCPdR 779). What follows is a harsh anti-democratic version of the song which implies the ingredients of the later anti-Semitic variation:

> Who, in the glory days before 10 May, / The time of stuffed democrats, / Just loitering and on welfare too? / And went along the streets in worn down heels? / [. . .] Refrain: That was the common man / That very common man. / That very ordinary man with his ready-made suit on! His bigwigs got pennies, but he never got ahead! / That starveling, / Class fighter / of a common man. (Niod 103, SaCPdR 779)

The brief remarks obviously did not prevent critical responses. On 1 March, the conferencier clarifies in a lengthy explanation that the protest letters are mainly from opponents, and he now explicitly states: 'The songs by Louis Davids weren't by Louis Davids' (Niod 103, SaCPdR 1075). After this explanation, the song is performed again. However, the question of authorship seems to have remained unresolved. On 15 March, a somewhat annoyed conférencier responds to further complaints about the music repertoire of the 'Sunday Afternoon Cabaret', and now finally reveals the author: 'The played songs, [. . .] then presented by the late Louis Davids, were written by Jacques van Tol'. It is remarkable that the makers of the political cabaret were not only forced to utter the name of Louis Davids – after all it was forbidden to name or play music from Jewish artists – but to reveal the name of Jacques van Tol. Even though the names of the performers were always mentioned at the beginning of a broadcast, Jacques van Tol's name comes up for the first time. The debate casts light on the significance of an invisible authorship concerning the political cabaret, which is concealed by the fictional name Paulus de Ruiter. Thus, the name Paulus de Ruiter functions as stand-in for the 'transcendent, interpellating Subject', authorized by the National Socialist regime. Furthermore, the discussion elucidates that cultural identification (i.e. the cultural identification of the song with Louis Davids) cannot simply be counteracted by reclaiming authorship.

In the end, the ultimate interruption of this cultural identification was brought about by the crude anti-Semitic adaptation of the song aired on 15 March, culminating in the following refrain: 'That was the Jew-man / The fat Jew-man / Dressed in a suit of one hundred thalers from the tailor. / No matter how bad things got for somebody else, he got ahead / That cunning / Cooked-up / Fat Jew-man!' (Niod 103, SaCPdR 1225) It is supposedly not only from a contemporary point of view that the anti-Semitic version lacks any humorous aspects: it does not at all play with ambivalences or double perspectives, it straightforwardly establishes Jewish citizens as undesirable, unwanted, as the complete Other of the 'new order'. Considering that the song was created before the yellow Star of David was introduced (3 May 1942) in the Netherlands and before raids systematically took place, the dramaturgy of the political cabaret can be considered as part of the political strategy to prepare the public sphere in the Netherlands for the coming deportations and destruction of Jewish citizens in the Netherlands.

Restaging the scene

It is understandable that after the Second World War the indignation concerning the 'Sunday Afternoon Cabaret' concentrated around this song. However, I would like to argue that it was in fact the weekly enactment of anti-Semitism which worked in favour of National Socialist ideology. The two versions of 'That is the common man', the 'serenade' or the dialogues between Keuvel and Klessebes illustrate that the various layers of ideological practices began to overlap, that is, the institutions of democracy or opponents of the regime were increasingly depicted as Jewish – the same is true for the allied powers, especially the American military power. However, the mechanism of resignification is double-edged. On the one hand, opposing ideological/political practices such as democracy or opposing military forces are denigrated by designating them as Jewish; on the other hand, the repertoire of stereotypical depreciations is shifted from unmasking 'anti's' to the image of 'the Jew'. As a consequence, 'Dutch' opponents of the regime get entangled in nationalistic imaginaries. In this regard, a change of the dramaturgical staging of the sketches of Keuvel and Klessebes is of interest. Parallel to the growing anti-Semitism in the programme, doubts begin to creep into the dialogues of the two fierce 'anti's'. On 22 February 1942, Keuvel remarks that people increasingly comment on one or two things with regard to the 'old time':

> They say, for example: The fuss with thirty political parties can stay away. And more of those things. Do you know what you hear a lot, too? The Jews sing small now – and that's a pretty good thing. When we've won, it has to stay that way. You hear that a lot. (Niod 103, SaCPdR 780)

According to these comments, the interventions into ideological practices and imaginaries, that is, the National Socialist appropriation of Christian or Socialist ideological frames, seem to work. Dramaturgically of importance is the staging of Keuvel and Klessebes on 22 March 1942, 1 week after the outrageous anti-Semitic proclamation. Till then they are literally showcased as stubborn, stupid and self-centred *voices from outside*. On 22 March, however, they turn up *in* the scene of the political cabaret as somewhat uncomfortable members of the audience, who try to stay steadfast but cannot deny a certain attraction. Klessebes even remarks that it is not uncosy here and she even is highly amused by the song of 'Three old gossip mongers' ending with the verses:

> For two years they waited, these three there on that fence!
>
> Two years on a fence!
>
> Germany just didn't lose, then they said: Damn it!
>
> I no longer wait in the cold,
>
> It's December! (Niod 103, SaCPdR 1292)

The dialogues that were staged as *voices from outside* are now re-staged as dialogues of *different voices inside*; voices that might oppose each other, but which nevertheless become trapped in the totalitarian discourse. In terms of interpellation, Keuvel and Klessebes are no longer showcased as 'countersubjects' but are enacted as bad, not-yet

subjects. This shift of subjectivation is programmatically expressed by the song 'You belong too' placed between the various parts of the dialogue of the sketch. Thus, the exclusion of the Jewish population, and the consistent identification of resistance/opposition as Jewish, provides the precondition for the redefinition of the ideological field of interpellation. Although Keuvel and Klessebes remain present as opposing voices, they are staged *as part of the scene* struggling to resist the appeal of the interpellating voice. The dramaturgical inclusion of opponents reframes the scene of interpellation: by defining Jewish people as the absolute 'other', the opponents of the regime are staged as sympathetic 'bad subjects', as 'not-yet subjects', ready to be taken in by National Socialist ideology, which is to say that there is no outside of Dutch national and cultural identity.

When the allied forces started to convincingly force back the German Army, the humorous strategy of the political cabaret obviously lost its foundations, which were linked to the military and political power of the German Reich and its representatives in the Netherlands. Dissatisfaction with the quality of the productions of the political cabaret increased during the last months and led to the programme being stopped at the end of December 1943.

Conclusion

In her article 'Theatrical Machines', Judith Butler (2015) raises an important question in relation to Althusser's interpellation scene: '[. . .] is there not a critical alternative that focuses less on what you call me than on what calls when you call?' (p. 33) Thus, it is the question for the authorizing voice, or the operations of ideological power implied in scenes of interpellation. Applied to the political cabaret discussed above, the anonymity or invisibility of Jacques van Tol as author turned out to be crucial. The fictious name Paulus de Ruiter hides 'what calls', that is, 'the ideological reach and power of the call' (Butler, 2015: 34). Irrespective of whether Jacques van Tol wished to be known as the author or not, the dramaturgy of ideology as presented by the programme relied on the fact that the authorized voice stayed invisible, that the structure of ideological interpellation was not interrupted and made visible like in the theatre of Bertolt Brecht. The fictional name Paulus de Ruiter functioned as a stand-in for and was authorized by the absolute power of the 'new order' of the National Socialist regime.

Analysing the dramaturgical staging of humour working upon the imaginary of the masses (cf. Balibar, 2015: 19) allows for tracing various operations of shifting, interrupting or appropriating 'ideological apparatuses', to use Althusser's terminology. Numerous humour theories pay attention to operations of inclusion and exclusion. However, humorous strategies not only work on the imaginary of 'the Other' (exclusion) but also on images of 'the Self' as part of a socio-political community (inclusion). The case reveals how a diversified field of ideological practices became destabilized by shifting and appropriating ideological significations. By humorously exposing 'countersubjects' as aberrations of the various ideological frames and appropriating cultural and ideological imaginaries, the political cabaret continuously worked upon the layered field of ideological identities. In a process of appropriation, humorous exclusion basically implied an appeal to recognize that National Socialist policies provided for a 'true' practice of Christian and socialist imaginaries.

Later on, the political cabaret staged a very different dramaturgy of inclusion and exclusion. While during the first stage, Dutch opponents of the regime, the Dutch government in exile, the British army, the allied forces, etc. were indicated as countersubjects, in the period that followed the exclusion was performed by connoting all opponents without any differentiation as Jewish. Subsequently, the Jewish population was not only excluded but also addressed as non-subject. Of relevance in this context is Bergson's notion that '[t]he comic [. . .] appeals to the intelligence pure and simple; laughter is incompatible with emotion. Depict some fault, however trifling, in such a way as to arouse sympathy, fear, or pity; the mischief is done, it is impossible for us to laugh' (p. 150). Based on this assertion 'The Sunday Afternoon Cabaret' can be understood as a contribution to the emotional preparation of the Dutch people to accept the prosecution of its Jewish fellow citizens. With regard to ideological interpellation, the expulsion of Jewish people allowed for a reconfiguration of the ideological field. In terms of dramaturgy, the change was made visible by the shift from staging the opponents as voices from outside to addressing the opponents as voices inside the scene. Humour as performed by the political cabaret worked on the layered ideological landscape to merge the various practices into the ideology of National Socialism resulting in the image of an allegedly homogeneous national body.

The question of the relevance of this historical example for the understanding of humour in contemporary movements, increasingly shifting from authoritarian towards totalitarian socio-political imaginaries, and in the context of what is called the 'post-truth' society is one that obviously exceeds the scope of this article, though that context is pertinent to my arguments. To begin with, humorous strategies always imply a political dimension, insofar as they intervene in, confirm or redefine societal self-understandings. The analysis of dramaturgies of interpellation allows for a critical re-evaluation of mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion as evoked by humorous utterances and aesthetics. Turning the focus on humorous shifts of social-political imaginaries involves a reinterpretation of facts and reality. To be sure, the re-interpretation of facts in no way denies the existence of factual matters, or as Hannah Arendt puts it in her distinction between opinions, facts and interpretations: 'Even if we admit that every generation has the right to write its own history, we admit no more than that it has the right to rearrange the facts in accordance with its own perspective; we do not admit the right to touch the factual matter itself' (Arendt, 1968: 238–239). As the case study and current political developments show, totalitarian political regimes or civic movements with a totalitarian direction are not only engaged in a war *about* facts, but especially in a war *on* facts. The relevant question is whether humour allows for a multi-layered public sphere (regardless of whether it is considered as antagonistic or consensual) or paves the way for ideological structures of exclusion. Here the dramaturgical staging of 'countersubjects' and 'failed subjects' is of importance. Are countersubjects positioned inside or outside the imagined socio-political scene? Do countersubjects become 'failed subjects' by (nationalist, racist, sexist, fundamentalist and/or religious) re-signification within the ideologically redefined political body? In the context of totalitarian ideologies, scenes of interpellation not only reveal the difference between inclusion and exclusion in terms of discipline, humiliation or control, but also set the scene to distinguish between inclusion and *extinction*, that is, the definition of non-subjects who are radically deprived of their right to exist.

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Notes

1. Both the competing German National Socialist fractions and the Dutch National Socialist Movement aimed at a different status for the Netherlands: Reichsparteileiter-NSDAP Martin Bormann aspired to the territorial annexation of the Netherlands; Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler envisioned the Netherlands as part of a Great-Germanic Empire governed by the SS; the N.S.B. aimed at a sovereign National Socialist country linked to Germany in a confederation of states (Van Berkel, 2013: 282).
2. In his contribution on radio during the Second World War, Huub Wijfjes refers to the scarcity of factual data, which do not allow precise statements about the effectivity of (propagandistic) radio programmes and whether Dutch masses listened to the radio or not. (p. 69)
3. Pater refers to the similar character of British radio shows in the 1930s (p. 118).
4. The manuscripts relating to the programme are spread over various inventories of Collection 103, Nederlandsche Omroep, at the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies. Subsequently, I will refer to the articles by NIOD 103, followed by the abbreviation SaCPdR (Sunday Afternoon Cabaret by Paulus de Ruiter) and the original number of the manuscript (which does not correspond with the inventory number!). All translations are by the author.
5. The song is a good example of the importance of music in satirizing lyrics. The adaptation and transformation of popular music is a common practice of vaudeville formats and plays a significant role in counter-framing social imaginaries, as some of the following examples will indicate.

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