

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE GLOBAL COLD WAR AND BELGIUM

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The introduction to this themed issue has briefly evaluated Belgian Cold War historiography, positioned the articles in social-cultural approaches to the conflict and suggested ways of reading them through political-economic looking glasses. Inspired by the stimulating material the authors presented, this concluding essay identifies avenues for further research into the multifarious ways the East-West conflict impacted Belgian politics, the economy and society at large. Special attention goes to the prehistory of the studied phenomena, to the resonance of the *Global Cold War* in Belgium, and to the long lasting impact of the conflict on the fabric of Belgian civil society. Both the form and content of political mobilization in today's digital age, are indeed reminiscent of the Cold War period, along with some its most persistent 'floating signifiers', concepts which derive their meaning precisely from the social contexts in which they are used (such as 'decolonisation', 'solidarity', 'peace', etc.). In order to grasp these dimensions, the concept of 'ideology', it will be argued, is best understood as a set of discursive practices tied to a plethora of (fleeting) 'political subjectivities'.

I. Precursors

The intriguing take on trade between the GDR, USSR and Belgium during détente in Briamont's article provides a first case in point. The ties between trade and détente actually predate the Cold War and were firmly rooted in a change of policy within the Comintern (Seventh Congress, 1935). The trade agreement between the BLEU (Belgium-Luxembourg Economic Union) and the USSR, of September 1935, signalled the normalization of diplomatic relations for the first time since the Revolution of 1917. These relations mostly assumed the form of 'cultural exchanges' and came to an end with the Second World War. A bilateral trade and payments agreement was signed in Moscow in January 1948, yet was to lose some of its significance in the context of the multilateral export controls, as discussed by De Ridder, Luyten & Kerremans in this issue.¹ Along with this bilateral agreement, however, an immediate precursor to Tracosa was founded in Antwerp: OCIMEX.² The commissions it earned were transferred to the French sister party (PCF) and funnelled back as party financing to the PCB. The quest for political independence from the PCF, during the so-called 'de-Stalinization' congress of Vilvorde (1954), was therefore inextricably tied to financial and commercial concerns.³ OCIMEX was gradually dissolved and eventually replaced by Tracosa in 1956.⁴ When a

first schismatic Maoist party was born out of the PCB, in 1963, it similarly set up its own company, Sodexim, with a virtual monopoly on Sino-Belgian trade.⁵ The (quasi-)monopoly position of the PCB, as a broker for Belgian trade with the Comecon countries, likely gave the party a *raison d'être* well beyond its apparent social and political significance.⁶ When the Iron Curtain dropped, this opened an unexpected window of commercial opportunity, defying what some would describe as ideological boundaries.

This is also illustrated in this issue (and elsewhere) by Goddeeris, who well documents how a leading liberal politician like Roger Motz became an informer for the Polish communists while being involved in Belgo-Polish trade companies in the early 1950s.⁷ Several so-called '*organisations de masse*' ('front organizations') could shore up support for these commercial endeavours. Further on the communist peace movement (UBDP) will be discussed, but also the many 'friendship committees' with such countries as Poland (1947), China (1957) and the GDR (1963) could serve as commercial gateways by organizing trade missions, etc. Their economic purpose, then, cannot be dissociated from their functioning as tools of cultural and informal diplomacy, which Scott-Smith pointed out in this issue. Many founding members of these 'friendship committees' – whether they were liberals, socialists or communists –

1. KATLIJN MALFIET, "De Belgo-Sovjet handelsbetrekkingen", *Studia Diplomatica*, 41/3, 1988, 315-327.

2. OCIMEX was founded on January 16, 1948. Its main shareholders were Armand Kratly and Jean Fonteyne's (PCB) brother in law, Henri Goffard. See *Recueil spécial des actes, extraits d'actes, procès-verbaux et documents relatifs aux sociétés commerciales. Annexe au Moniteur belge*, 8 février 1948, 2202; JEAN LEMAÎTRE, *C'est un joli nom, camarade: Jean Fonteyne, avocat de l'internationale communiste*, Bruxelles, 2012, 339-340.

3. JEAN LEMAÎTRE, *C'est un joli nom*, 340-341.

4. This can also be inferred from Guy Cooreman's (PCB) track record, who started his career as a lawyer at the PCF related BERIM (study bureau on East-west trade) in Paris before joining OCIMEX in Brussels and eventually Tracosa in 1957. Guy Cooreman in RIK DECAN, *Wie is wie in Vlaanderen 1980: Biografische encyclopedie*, Brussel, 1980, 166.

5. Sodexim was founded by Henri Lederhandler who had been a member of the PCB between 1950 and 1963.

See HENRI LEDERHANDLER & SERGE PAIROUX, *Henri Lederhandler: Un parcours improbable*, Bruxelles, 2013.

6. In the 1970s S.A. Eurintrade (Bank Lambert) would open its Moscow office and serve, alongside Tracosa, as an officially recognized trader. On S.A. Eurintrade: PAUL-F. SMETS, *Lambert: Une aventure bancaire et financière (181-1975)*, Bruxelles, 2012, 377-386.

7. Motz became the co-owner of a Belgo-Polish trading company, Belgorop, in 1952. It traded with four Polish import-export centrals for, among others, chemicals and agricultural products. See IDESBALD GODDEERIS, "Code Names Szejik and Szeryf: The Collaboration of the Belgian Minister Roger Motz with the Polish Secret Services at the Background of Belgian-Polish Economic Relations in the Early Cold War" in: PRZEMYSŁAW SZCZUR (dir.), *La Pologne des Belges. Evolution d'un regard (XX^e-XXI^e siècles)*, Kraków, 2021, 251-268, IDESBALD GODDEERIS, *Spioneren voor het communisme: Belgische prominenten en Poolse geheim agenten*, Tielt, 2013, 161-164.

had ties to Second World War resistance movements and Tracosa.⁸

In the wider context of détente, Belgium and the USSR would go on to sign an agreement on economic, scientific, and technical cooperation in 1969. It paved the way for the first ever trade and payments agreement between a European economic entity, the Benelux, and the USSR in 1971.⁹ Trade relations thus lay at the heart of what came to be known as the ‘long détente’, but could sort strikingly different effects behind the ‘Nylon Curtain’. Midway the 1970s, countries like the USSR soon proved unable to implement both western technology and capital investments. The USSR was also adamant about controlling its foreign-currency debt, contrary to its ‘renegade’ satellite, Romania. This is the political-economic background of the USSR’s inability to catch up with the American (nuclear) ‘arms race’ from around 1970 onward and its accompanying ‘peace’ rhetoric.

Herrera Crespo’s article on *Opération Villages roumaines* raises interesting political economic questions in this regard. Ceaușescu ‘systematization of localities’ program was actually a form of forced labour allocation from small agriculture to large agro-industrial centres. While other Eastern European countries began to implement economic reforms, Romania’s leader stubbornly insisted on a strict central planning framework. Foreign policy-wise, Ceaușescu may well have been considered a ‘maverick communist’ in the West. In economic affairs, “he remained an unreconstructed Stalinist throughout the period of his rule”, according to the IMF.¹⁰ It was precisely the combination of both policies that spelled disaster

in the 1980s. What followed was a humanitarian crisis and the only violent revolution of 1989.

II. The (de)colonisation-Cold War nexus

This interplay between the politics and economics of détente gradually draws the (de)colonisation-Cold War nexus into the equation. Decolonisation spelled the position of nonalignment, which eventually opened up a window of opportunity for communist leaders like Nicolae Ceaușescu (and Yugoslav President Tito). In the wake of the Prague Spring, the Romanian dictator tried to maximise his leverage in the West and gain access to foreign loans and markets. Romania began to take an interest in post-colonial Africa in order to take its place, along Yugoslavia, within the matrix of ‘tiersmondism’. This led to the ingenious ideological device of Romania as a ‘socialist developing country’ in 1972.¹¹ Romania joined the GATT in 1971 and was accepted into the IMF and World Bank a year later. In his memoirs, Prime Minister Gaston Eyskens would wittily recount Ceaușescu state visit to Belgium in that same year.¹² During his four day visit, the Romanian leader apparently tried to wield his ideological device and prestige, in order to secure an economic treatment similar to ‘Third World countries’. All to no avail. Romania would acquire preferential trading status, though, with the European Economic Community (EEC) as early as 1973. Through these ‘successful’ foreign policies, Romanian foreign debt would eventually soar to a staggering 13 billion dollars in the early 1980s. Surprising both friend and foe, Ceaușescu would pay back all its loans to commercial banks by 1989. Under IMF guidance, the country indeed drastically cut its imports and increased its exports.

8. The aforementioned Henri Lederhandler was the founding member of *L'association Belgique Chine*. Some references can also be found in KIM CHRISTIAENS & JOS CLAEYS, “Forgotten Friends and Allies: Belgian Social Movements and Communist Europe (1960s-1990s)”, in KIM CHRISTIAENS, JOHN NIEUWENHUYNS & CHAREL ROEMER (eds.), *International Solidarity in the Low Countries during the Twentieth Century: New Perspectives and Themes*, Berlin & Boston, 2020, 160-162, ANNE MORELLI, “Les Amitiés belgo-polonaises, un chaînon du lien belge avec les démocraties populaires”, PRZEMYSŁAW SZCZUR (ed.), *La Pologne des Belges*, 76-77.

9. KATLIJN MALFLIET, “De Belgo-Sovjet handelsbetrekkingen”, 315-327.

10. DIMITRI DEMEKAS & MOHSIN KHAN, “The Romanian Economic Reform Program”, *IMF Working Paper*, 91/80, 5.

11. EMANUEL COPILAȘ, “Third World Themes in the International Politics of the Ceaușescu Regime or the International Affirmation of the ‘Socialist Nation’”, *Symposion*, 5/1, 2018, 21-40.

12. GASTON EYSKENS, *De memoires*, Tielt, 1993, 731.

Since the end of the 1970s, however, Romania had been a net importer of food supplies from the West. Ceaușescu's ruthless austerity policies compounded his lack of economic reforms and would lead to civil unrest that spread like wildfire across the country throughout the 1980s.¹³ The humanitarian crisis in Romania was the unexpected and tragic outcome of the politics and economics of the 'long détente'. A crisis eerily reminiscent of the plight of post-colonial countries across the globe.

Taking a broader view on how the (de)colonialisation-Cold War nexus has influenced Belgian scholars, we find that a renewed interest in Belgium's colonial past, for instance, has sparked new insights into post-war public diplomacy.¹⁴ Frank Gerits argued that, in the 1950s, it was "the fate of colonialism – not the Cold War – that pre-occupied Belgian public diplomats."¹⁵ However, could the bare fact that the campaigns of their mouthpiece, the Belgian Information Center (BIC), were solely directed to US audiences not be indicative of colonialism's fate as part of a Cold War-infused transformation in the more global core-periphery structure? The periphery tripled as roughly one hundred countries, from mainly Africa and Asia, joined its ranks. Although the periphery gained its own political standing and agency, the subordinate economic position of these countries remained largely intact. In short, decolonisation would add a North-South divide to an already bipolar world political economy.¹⁶

This subsequently opens up fascinating questions on the place of European integration and

so-called 'development aid' within the *Global Cold War*.¹⁷ The pooling of coal and steel production was explicitly referenced by Robert Schuman, in 1950, as contributing to one of Europe's "essential tasks, namely, the development of the African continent."¹⁸ Belgium's 'open-door' trade policy in the Congo was in turn an inherent part of its image as a 'liberal beacon' on the world stage.¹⁹ During a meeting of the contracting parties of the GATT, in 1957, Jean-Charles Snoy aimed to ease the apprehensions of the third countries to the freshly signed Treaty of Rome. The common market would increase the expansion of global trade, but Snoy sought a remarkably political solution to the special terms of association between colonial parts of Africa and the EEC (art.131-136): a preferential tariff system that at once contradicted and extended Belgium's 'open-door' policy in the heart of Africa. According to Snoy, Latin American and Scandinavian countries would do well to accept the Treaty of Rome, if they were ever to count on European support for their own prospective customs and economic unions.

The project of European integration clearly had to encompass the overseas territories, since African resources were deemed indispensable to the stability of the endeavour in its entirety.²⁰ Economic integration was a desperate European attempt to cling to its colonial legacy, but Belgium also hoped that it would finally allow them to by-pass the French tariff system of imperial preferences. It was the implementation of the Marshall plan, through the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), that inaugurated (Franco-Belgian)

13. DENNIS DELETANT, *Ceausescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965-1989*, London, 1995, 70, 130, 249.

14. For the difference between propaganda and public diplomacy: NICOLAS J. CULL, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989*, Cambridge, 2008.

15. FRANK GERITS, "Défendre l'oeuvre que nous réalisons en Afrique": Belgian Public Diplomacy and the Global Cold War (1945-1966)", *Dutch Crossing*, 40/1, 2016, 72.

16. AMITAV ACHARYA & BARRY BUZAN, *The Making of Global International Relations Origins and Evolution of IR at its Centenary*, Cambridge, 2019, 114-115.

17. PATRICK PASTURE, "The EC/EU between the Art of Forgetting and the Palimpsest of Empire", *European Review*, 26/3, 2018, 545-581; PEO HANSEN & STEFAN JONSSON, *Eurafrica: The Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism*, London, 2015.

18. As cited in PATRICK PASTURE, *Imagining European Unity since 1000 AD*, London, 192.

19. On the Congo and the Belgian economy: GUY VANTHEMSCHE, *Belgium and the Congo, 1885-1980*, Cambridge, 2012, 143-199.

20. ETIENNE DESCHAMPS, *Entre héritage colonial et destin européen: la Belgique, le Congo et la problématique de l'outre-mer dans le processus d'intégration européenne (1945-1960), Vol II*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, European University Institute, 2016, 674.

colonial collaboration in the area of public investments.²¹ Integrating the overseas territories into a common European market was eventually put forward, in the early 1950s, as an adequate political tool to keep such anticolonial forces as the USA, UN, USSR and Pan-Africanism at bay.²²

A somewhat understated part of these colonial entanglements, was the ideology and practice of 'development aid'. Raising the standard of living of its colonial subjects was the more obvious part of these policies. Increasing African production, through private and public investments, had been the prime concern of the OEEC and its special Committee for Overseas Territories (OTC, 1948). It paved the way for its competitor, the EEC's Overseas Development Fund (ODF, 1958). As a Cold War economic institution, the OEEC, would bridge the colonial and post-colonial eras. After the Marshall plan had come to an end, it played an underemphasized role in the articulation of global 'development' discourse. Economic policies were discussed in a Cold War setting while closely eyeing the emerging power-bloc of decolonizing countries.²³

The scarce histories of Belgian development aid have glossed over this (de)colonisation-Cold War nexus by prioritising the role of the UN and the EEC instead.²⁴ The OTC, however, was more than a study committee and acted as a liaison between the OEEC and the overseas territories along with their metropolitan governments. Private and public investments were considered crucial to the development of these territories and would have a multiplier effect on private investments. This can be inferred from Jean-Charles Snoy's curious and ill-fated "plan to absorb surpluses and support development in underdeveloped regions" (1955-1956).

Here is not the place to discuss it in detail, but the "Snoy Plan"²⁵ was indeed an attempt to export "Western" agricultural and textile surpluses to "underdeveloped regions" under the moniker of a 'Marshall plan' comprising grants and loans. The grants ('foreign aid') would be converted into a counterpart fund that would serve to finance infrastructure plans. The loans would be used for investments in capital goods. The plan would be a multilateral effort, encompassing the United States and Canada, to "enhance the underdeveloped regions of the OEES countries and their overseas territories."²⁶ The Cold War overtones of Snoy's 'Marshall plan' are obvious, but it was also a thinly concealed attempt at *associating* the OEEC countries -including the US- to Europe's imperial objectives and its accompanying 'developmental' ideology.

This moreover seamlessly ties in with some of the findings presented by De Ridder, Luyten & Kerremans. Belgium's less productive agricultural sector and hopelessly outdated textile industry were simply not sustainable without the subsidies implied by the "Snoy Plan". In the middle of the 1950s, the secretary-general of economic affairs, apparently saw no other option than to request a billion francs a year from the Belgian government, in order to dump agricultural and textile surpluses in the OEEC's overseas territories. The vice governor of the Belgian National Bank, Hubert Ansiaux, argued as much while ultimately sounding the death knell over the plan:

"Should one not fear that these artificial foreign markets, offered to the textile industry, will incite the latter to postpone the efforts it should undertake to increase its productivity and to adapt its production to new commer-

21. *Ibidem*. Vol I, 150.

22. *Ibidem*. Vol I, 395-396.

23. MATTHIAS SCHMELZER, "A Club of the Rich to Help the Poor? The OECD, 'Development', and the Hegemony of Donor Countries", in MARC FREY, SÖNKE KUNDEL & CORINNA R. UNGER (eds), *International Organizations and Development, 1945-1990*, London, 2017, 171-195; MATHIEU LEIMGRÜBER & MATTHIAS SCHMELZER (eds), *The OECD and the International Political Economy Since 1948*, London, 2017.

24. ETIENNE DESCHAMPS, « Penser l'aide aux pays en voie de développement dans la Belgique coloniale des années 1950 », in MICHEL DUMOULIN & ANNE-SOPHIE GIJS (dir.), *Du Congo belge à la République du Congo 1955-1965*, Bruxelles, 2012, 283-298.

25. Not to be confused with the 1970 European Monetary Union 'Snoy Plan'.

26. 'Plan de résorption des surplus et d'aide au développement des régions sous-développées' (annotated draft, pp. 1-3) KADOC, Archief Jean-Charles Snoy et d'Oppuers, 465.

cial conditions [...] When it comes to the technical details of the plan, I have little to say, it is undeniably clever. The problem is not the mechanics but rather the question whether we will have enough fuel to make it work.”²⁷

It is more than likely, that the political-economic reasoning behind the plan, eventually found its way into the articles of association of the treaty that Snoy and Spaak were to sign little over a year later. With the foreseeable disappearance of its less productive industries, Belgium would have become even more dependent on overseas markets for its capital goods. Decolonisation, however, would reconfigure relations between North and South and the fabric of the global economy as a whole. How did trade and investment policies fit into the transnational postcolonial visions of the ‘Global South’? Building on recent scholarship²⁸, a political economic approach could help to gauge the tensions between ‘anticolonial ideology’ and the postcolonial experience.

In 1957, Ghana became the first state in sub-Saharan Africa to wrestle free from European colonial rule. Its leader, Kwame Nkrumah, loathed the special terms of association between colonial parts of Africa and the European Economic Community. In his opening speech before the Positive Action Conference in April 1960, Nkrumah dryly noted: “The main benefit of this is reaped not by the people of these parts of Africa [...] but by European industry which is assured of cheap, tariff-free raw material.”²⁹ Mere months before Congolese independence – and with his protégé Lumumba in attendance – Nkrumah laid down his economic

vision: “Africa must be developed industrially, for her own sake and for the sake of a healthy world economy. This can only happen if the artificial boundaries that divide her are broken down so as to provide for viable economic units, and ultimately a single African unit.” Nkrumah’s answer to European encroachment within the refurbished core-periphery structure was... African economic integration: “This means an African common market, a common currency area and the development of communications of all kinds to allow the free flow of goods and services.”³⁰ A position devoid of references to Nkrumah’s well-known embrace of ‘African Socialism’ in the 1960s.³¹

The process of European economic integration went beyond the constraints of a bipolar world order, while casting the long shadow of European empire over such continents as Africa and Asia. For a brief while, this left African leaders such as Nkrumah with a vision of African economic integration as a way of bypassing both Western neocolonialism and the threat of “being recolonized by another white superpower” [the USSR], as Nana Osei-Opare eloquently put it.³² A policy that would be coined ‘African Socialism’ in the wake of geopolitical tensions that were sparked by the ‘wave of independence’ that swept across Africa in 1960. Historians are yet to assess the intellectual impact of the geopolitical boundaries, set by the Cold War, on the development of a postcolonial political economic vision for both Africa and Asia alike. The decolonisation-Cold War nexus is remarkably and more generally absent from even the most recent studies into the economic decolonisation of Congo.³³

27. Letter of Hubert Ansiaux, vice-governor of the National bank of Belgium, to Jean-Charles Snoy et d’Oppuers, 14 February 1956, p. 3 KADOC, Archief Jean-Charles Snoy et d’Oppuers, 465.

28. FRANK GERITS, *The Ideological Scramble for Africa: How the Pursuit of Anticolonial Modernity Shaped a Postcolonial Order, 1945-1966*, Ithaca, 2023.

29. Speech by the Prime Minister of Ghana, Conference on Positive Action and Security in Africa, Accra, 7th to 10th April, 1960, Community Centre, Accra, 1960, 6-7.

30. Ibidem.

31. See EMMANUEL KWAKU AKYEAMPONG, *Independent Africa: The First Generation of Nation Builders*, Bloomington, 2023, 153-210.

32. NANA OSEI OPARA, “Uneasy comrades: postcolonial statecraft, race and citizenship, Ghana-Soviet relations: 1957-1966”, *Journal of West African History*, 5/2, 2019, 87.

33. ROBRECHT DECLERCQ, “Economic decolonization and strategies of Belgian business after Congolese independence (1960-1978)” and MAITE VAN DEN BORRE, “De nationalisatie van de Congolese activa van de UMHK: afstoting en afhankelijkheid”, in *Journal of Belgian History*, 53/3, 2023, 74-98 and 98-126.

Bandung, the Suez crisis and Nasser's revolutionary nationalism further highlight the entangled history of the Cold War and decolonization, while shattering an all too narrowly bipolar interpretation of its global ramifications. American policy-makers clearly sensed that European empire in the Middle East had run its course, while Maoist China's internationalist activism began to denounce Soviet "revisionism" and "peaceful coexistence".³⁴

III. Moving Beyond the 'Pillarization' of Belgian Society

Belgian domestic politics during the Cold War have long been studied from the perspective of pillarization, that is from the idea that the three main political 'blocs' – Catholics, Socialists, and Liberals – structured social and political life through all kinds of rival organizations.³⁵ Auwers' article in this volume suggests that, in the early 1950s, Catholic and Socialist journalists clearly started their analysis from this conflicting point of view, but that tensions between the 'pillars' were somewhat eased by a commonly accepted Cold War narrative. At the same time, his article seems to question a static view on these blocs themselves, as the Catholic pillar experienced considerable pressure from authoritarian Catholic groups situated on the far right of the political spectrum.

The same actually applied to the other side of this spectrum, which brings us to yet another aspect of Cold War Belgium that researchers have insuff-

ficiently acknowledged so far: the social-political and cultural impact of the dynamic between groups and individuals on the far left and those inside the (much smaller) 'pillar'³⁶ dominated by the Communist Party of Belgium (PCB-KPB). A 'pillarized' view on these actors, as privileged by Kim Christiaens in his critique of what he labelled "the 1968 historiography", effectively identifies historical actors who were crucial in bringing about political change.³⁷ What has remained somewhat under the historiographical radar, however, are the social-cultural dynamics preceding policy-making.

The many faces of Maoism and the fact that, until 1984, there was no international organization similar to the Comintern (USSR) or The Fourth International (Trotskyism), explains its striking appeal, defying and transcending pillarization and its 'ideological' borders. This calls into scrutiny the organizational dimensions of these discursive practices. Recent research on international solidarity in the Low Countries has aptly referenced, some of these dimensions, as the "infrastructure" of solidarity.³⁸ We would like to call particular attention, however, to the institutional context in which, for instance, legal personality was required of a non-profit organisation (*asbl-vzw*) in order to become eligible for government funding. This brings us straight to what Mary P. Sheridan-Rabideau has more prosaically coined "the economics of activism".³⁹ Pillarization in the Low Countries partly made so-called grassroots organisations financially dependent on

34. MARK PHILIP BRADLEY, "Decolonization, the Global South and the Cold War, 1919-1962", in MELVYN P. LEFFLER and ODD ARNE WESTAD (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War: Vol. 1, Origins*, Cambridge, 2010, 464-485.

35. See STAF HELLEMANS, "Pillarization ('Verzuiling'). On Organized 'Self-Contained Worlds' in the Modern World", *The American Sociologist*, 51, 2020, 124-147. On pp. 138-139 of this article, Hellemans, who admits that the use of the term pillar is not unproblematic to describe this phenomenon, nonetheless advances that a pillar comprises "(a) a major section of the population (b) that is held together by a pervasive subculture, (c) and by a network of functionally differentiated organizations, (d) including a political party".

36. Hellemans suggests that, at certain stages of their development, the Communists, could more or less be considered a pillar. See STAF HELLEMANS, "Pillarization", 139. If ever this was the case, it occurred during the early Cold War period.

37. KIM CHRISTIAENS & JOS CLAEYS, "Forgotten Friends and Allies", 159-181, KIM CHRISTIAENS, "Voorbij de 1968-historiografie? Nieuwe perspectieven op internationale solidariteitsbewegingen tijdens de Koude Oorlog. Kritische reflecties en commentaren vanuit België", *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, 128/3, 2015, 377-406.

38. KIM CHRISTIAENS, JOHN NIEUWENHUYIS & CHAREL ROEMER, "Introduction: The Power, Borders and Legacies of International Solidarity in the Low Countries in International Solidarity", in KIM CHRISTIAENS, JOHN NIEUWENHUYIS & CHAREL ROEMER (eds.), *International Solidarity in the Low Countries*, 10.

39. MARY P. SHERIDAN-RABIDEAU, *Girls, Feminism, and Grassroots literacies: Activism in the GirlZone*, Albany, 2008, 127-153.

external funding. A broad range of political and transnational issues could gradually become institutionalized in the process. This obviously raises questions about movements that initially operated on the fringes (KPB-PCB) or largely outside (Maoism, Trotskyism, etc.) of pillarization as well as their successors, and their (in)direct funding under what came to be known as the policies of 'state sponsored pluralism'.

De Weerd's article on Yvonne Sterk in this issue unpacks the intersecting and multi-layered reception of Maoist 'anti-imperialism'. Her analysis adds fuel to Christiaens' argument that the international solidarity movements of the 1960s were an integral part of the history of the Cold War rather than a reaction to it.⁴⁰ However, many of these organisations did not have ties to the Communist Party, yet operated in a dynamic relation with it. Hailing from a Christian middle-class family, Sterk would gradually get involved with the Palestinian Cause, in the 1960s, through her literary and journalistic endeavours in the Middle East. In 1969 she became one of the founding members of a precursor to the *Comité national Palestine* alongside Luc Sommerhausen (ex-PCB), Isabel Blum (ex-PSB and PCB) and Marcel Liebman (Trotskyist fellow-traveller and founding member of *La Gauche*).

These accolades surely confirm the crucial role of the Belgian communist party, but also of its dissidents and other far-left groups and individuals, in setting up anticolonial movements and 'peace' initiatives. This further calls into question what was supposedly 'new' about the so-called New Left.⁴¹ Loose references to Maoist 'anti-imperialism' allowed the *Comité national Palestine*

to gradually link-up the Palestinian Cause with Vietnam's ongoing 'heroic struggle' for national independence. References that went well beyond the communist 'peace' rhetoric as espoused by the World Peace Council. These discursive practices around 'peace' merit further exploration since they trace their origins to the 'Rassemblement Universel pour la Paix' founded in Brussels in 1936 and thus initially bore strong 'popular front' overtones.⁴²

During another stay of Sterk in the Middle East a distinctly politicized and authoritarian form of Maoism was born out of May '68. Across Europe and the US a disintegrating student movement began to give way to a variety of nascent 'vanguard parties'.⁴³ Most of these would not survive the 1970s, with the telling example of *Gauche Prolétarienne* in France. Maoism's appeal cannot be understood without taking its role in the struggle against colonialism into account. Maoist China's "defiance of colonialism" through 'People's War' (such as Sukarno's Indonesia and Julius Nyerere's Tanzania), as Julia Lovell has compellingly argued, "gave Mao and his programme a global moral glamour."⁴⁴ She insisted on analysing Maoism, not merely as an ideology, but as a discursive practice. A toolbox of specific kinds of governance and mobilisation with a "perplexing, inconsistent mutability".⁴⁵ Maoist political subjectivity could be disassembled and reassembled to meet the requirements of widely divergent contexts or simply dissolve into a dogmatic and insular identitarian ideology. Maoism's anti-intellectualism and ambivalent anti-institutionalism also aligned it more closely to populism than other 'Marxist' discursive practices and organisations. Competing forms of 'communist subjectivity' have to some

40. KIM CHRISTIAENS, "Voorbij de 1968-historiografie?", 378.

41. Ibidem.

42. See RACHEL MAZUY, « Le rassemblement universel pour la paix (1931-1939) : une organisation de masse ? », *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps*, 30, 1993, 40-44. These overtones would gradually disappear during the earliest years of the Cold War (i.e. Zhdanov doctrine as introduced in the USSR in 1946 and espoused by the Cominform in 1947). On its impact in Eastern Europe: MELISSA FEINBERG, *Curtain of lies : the battle over truth in Stalinist Eastern Europe*, Oxford, 31-59.

43. JULIA LOVELL, *Maoism : A Global History*, London, 2020, 266-306.

44. Ibidem, 53.

45. Ibidem, 59.

extent drawn the critical attention from historians in recent decades.⁴⁶

The more general social-political and cultural significance of Maoism and Trotskyism (RAL-LRT) has been grossly overlooked by Belgian scholars. It is common knowledge that the left populism of the PVDA-PTB can be traced back to its Maoist (AMADA-TPO) origins (“servir le peuple”), and originated among students from rural Flanders who met at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven. The Trotskyist origins of RAL-LRT, then, lay in the 1920s and, contrary to the insularism of its Maoist counterparts, in different attempts at ‘entryism’ in the 1930s, 1950s and early 1960s. Until the late 1960s, Trotskyism primarily attracted militants from urban and industrial environments, and could still benefit from ties to traditional working class movements.

From 1970 onwards, Trotskyist subjectivity was as much informed by the decolonial struggles of the 1950s and 60s and the Cold War, as it was by the ‘Trente Glorieuses’ of economic growth. Trotskyist militants played a purely auxiliary role in a series of wildcat strikes in 1970-1971. When the RAL-LRT was founded in 1971, the members of the political bureau were between 17 and 38 years and none of them were industrial workers. Throughout the 1970s the RAL sought to gain a foothold in what were dubbed “the new struggles”: feminist, homosexual, environmentalist, cultural, etc. The ‘Rooie Vlinders’, for instance, would pair radical social

criticism with a ferocious defence of the rights of homosexuals. It was the first organisation of its kind in Dutch-speaking Belgium.⁴⁷ Two paid cadres of the RAL in the 1970s, Paul Verbraeken and Ida Dequecker, would in the 2000s either posthumously lend their name to a series of lectures ‘challenging the reigning neoliberal discourse’ or become a founding member of the self-asserted and strongly mediatized ‘feminist and antiracist collective’ Baas Over Eigen Hoofd (BOEH).⁴⁸ Tom Lanoye’s equally mediatized, recent intervention in the debate on ‘woke’ and ‘anti-woke’, was developed within the organizational context of the ‘Paul Verbraeken lectures’.⁴⁹ BOEH as a ‘collective’-instead of movement- similarly marks an interesting 21st-century shift from anti-capitalist and feminist ‘militancy’ to post-colonial and feminist ‘activism’. The radical left thus may have played an important role in shaping this transition from ‘militancy’ to the more fleeting notion of ‘activism’. A development not dissimilar to the social-political shift from ‘pillarization’ to ‘civil society’. It offered second and third generation migrants, in Dutch-speaking Belgium, not only agency but also organisational structures to voice their discontent regarding racism and islamophobia. Issues that were seemingly more difficult to develop discursively and address, for members of earlier generations, within Belgium’s pillarized structures or even ‘state-sponsored pluralism’ (see below).

Historians are arguably well-equipped to write the genealogies of these ‘new’ forms of social and

46. PROMA RAYCHAUDHURY, “Working at becoming a communist’: institutional belonging and political self-making of women in the Communist Party of India (Marxist)”, *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 61/1, 2023, 36-64; WIDUKIND DE RIDDER, “De communistische subjectiviteit onder de Koude Oorlog: de uitsluitingen uit de Kommunistische Partij van België (1944-1956)”, *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, 36/1-2, 2006, 157-195; CLAUDE PENNETIER & BERNARD PUDAL (dir.) *Le sujet communiste: Identités militantes et laboratoires du « moi »*, Rennes, 2014.

47. RIK HEMMERIJCKX, “In de geest van mei 68. Arbeidersprotest en radicaal militantisme in België”, *Bijdragen tot de Eigentijdse Geschiedenis*, 18, 2007, 163-182. On the PVDA/PTB: PASCAL DELWIT, *PTB, nouvelle gauche vieille recette*, Liège, 2014, 381 p. On post-war Trotskyism: SIMON HUPKENS, *La Ligue révolutionnaire des travailleurs (LRT), 1971-1984*, Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP 2017 (n° 2335-2336), 2017; JEAN-MARIE CHALUVIER, « Gauchisme » et nouvelle gauche en Belgique (I)(II), Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP 1973/14-16 (n° 600-601 & 602-603), 1973.

48. The first Paul Verbraeken (1946-2004) lecture took place in 2006 and is annually published by VUBPRESS. Interestingly enough, no reference is made in print to Verbraeken’s Trotskyist past and he is instead consistently described as a “versatile activist and free-thinker who highly valued critical reason” (veelzijdig activist en vrijdenker die de kritische rede hoog in het vaandel droeg). See TARIQ ALI, *Brief aan een jonge moslim/Het Midden-Oosten: halverwege het drama?*, Paul Verbraeken lezing 2008, Brussel, 2008. On BOEH: SAMIRA AZABAR, IDA DEQUECKER, *BOEH! Baas over eigen hoofd*, Berchem, 2022, 220 p. Published by EPO founded in 1973 as *éducation prolétarienne/proletarische opvoeding* by AMADA (PVDA since 1979).

49. TOM LANOYE, *Woke is het nieuwe Marrakech-pact*, Brussel, 2023.

political activism around ethical themes such as antiracism, anti-apartheid, LGBT and equal rights, abortion, etc. A careful analysis, beyond such catch-all phrases as ‘Second Wave Feminism’ or ‘New Social Movements’, reveals a complex interplay between social-cultural developments and the process of party-political decision-making in a supposedly ‘depillarizing’ society.

In French-speaking Belgium, for instance, antiracism can be traced back to 1936 and the *Ligue belge contre le Racisme et l’Antisémitisme*. In a way similar to the *Rassemblement universel pour la paix*, founded in that same year, its origins can only be rendered intelligible through the Comintern and its Popular Front policies (1935-1939). In the context of the Cold War the *Ligue belge* would resurface as the aptly named *Mouvement contre le Racisme, l’Antisémitisme et pour la Paix* (MRAP, 1950). This discursive pairing of ‘peace’ and ‘anti-racism’ was part of the Cominform’s ‘peace offensive’ as launched in 1949. The ‘offensive’ would go on to target the so-called ‘warmongering West’ and detail American war crimes in Korea as well as expose racial segregation in the US.⁵⁰ In Belgium, however, the MRAP would also be among the first to call attention to the dangerous and inhumane working conditions of migrants from the Mediterranean. In the context of deepening *détente* the reference ‘pour la paix’ was eventually replaced by ‘contre la xénofobie’ and the movement was renamed MRAX in 1966.

One of its leading figures throughout the 1960s to 1980s was the aforementioned Marcel Liebman (*La Gauche*).⁵¹ As early as 1966, MRAX would inspire anti-racist legislative proposals that were submitted to parliament by socialist MPs.⁵² All of whom

also had a history in *La Gauche*, a journal founded by Ernest Mandel, prominent leader of the Trotskyist Fourth International, and socialist syndicalist Jacques Yerna in 1956. MRAX’s French counterpart, MRAP, would inspire a similar proposal that was adopted into law by *l’Assemblée nationale* in 1972.⁵³ The Belgian proposal would make it into legislation in 1981. In December 1980 a Frenchman of North-African origin was assassinated in Brussels by a member of the far-right movement *Front de la Jeunesse*.⁵⁴ The Christian-democrat and socialist government responded by adopting the *Loi Moureaux*, named after its socialist minister of justice, Philippe Moureaux, on July 30, 1981. Throughout the ‘institutionalisation’ of anti-racism, MRAX would gradually become associated with the Parti Socialiste by the turn of the 21st century. President of the board between 2014 and 2020 was Moureaux’s son-in-law.⁵⁵

It seems as though the societal impact of both the communist party and the far-left is in need of further investigation. Surely, such endeavour should not aim to give it a place in the pantheon of Belgium’s pacification democracy. It could simply offer a unique insight into the interplay between social-cultural dynamics and party political policy-making in Belgium and such against the backdrop of the Global Cold War. Global feminist movements, for instance, were influenced by the promise of women’s emancipation under socialism. Historians have recently claimed that “many of the demands of Western feminist movements after 1968 were already taken for granted by women living in socialist states.”⁵⁶ Even if these discursive practices around feminism amounted to little more than progressive posturing, they could have set in motion a social-cultural development that was sup-

50. MELISSA FEINBERG, “The fight for peace”, 31-59.

51. “Jospa, Hertz ou Ghert, dit Joseph Jaspar” and “Liebman(N) Marcel Nestor” in JEAN-PHILIPPE SCHREIBER (ed.), *Dictionnaire biographique des juifs de Belgique : figures du judaïsme belge XIXe-XXe siècles*, Berchem, 2002, 181-182 and 226-227.

52. Proposition de loi visant à réprimer certains actes inspirés par le racisme ou la xénophobie. 1 décembre 1966

53. THOMAS HOCHMAN, « Du lustre après dix lustres: la loi de 1972 contre le racisme a cinquante ans », *Revue des droits de l’homme*, 21, 2022, 1-6.

54. GWENAËL BRÈS, *L’affront national : le nouveau visage de l’extrême droite en Belgique*, Berchem, 1992, 37.

55. « Soupçons de favoritisme pro-PS au Mrax », *La Libre Belgique*, 23/09/2016.

56. CELIA DONERT, “Feminism, communism and global socialism: Encounters and entanglements” in JULIANE FÜRST et. al. (eds), *The Cambridge History of Communism, Vol. III, Endgames? Late communism in global perspective, 1968 to the present*, Cambridge, 2017, 399.

posedly mediated in Belgium through the process of pillarization. Through the implementation of legislation on anti-racism and gender equality by Social- and Christian-Democrats, anti-racism and feminism gradually became institutionalized. Politically marginalized though they were, the Communist Party and the far-left may therefore also have played an unexpected and often understated role in the social-cultural process of 'depillarization' and so-called 'secularisation'.⁵⁷ One example might serve to illustrate this. Pillarization was further institutionalised throughout the 'School Pact' (1958) and its undergirding principle of 'freedom of education'. The principle of pluralism was extended into the cultural sector through the Cultuurpact of 1972. This allowed the KPB-PCB's own pillarized cultural fund, Masereelfonds (1971), to become eligible for government funding. It was officially recognized in 1978 as a "non-party affiliated pluralist progressive fund." As such, it seems to have been at once a product and a catalyst of pillarization and gradual depillarisation in Dutch-speaking Belgium.⁵⁸

This process went down in Belgian history as (state) 'sponsored pluralism'. It entailed a positive outlook on 'civil society' at the expense of what was dismissively referred to as 'pillarized organisations'. Through 'sponsored pluralism', however, the government rendered these Civil Society Organisations financially dependent on regulated market-relations and imposed strict control on their 'output'.⁵⁹ The overarching political economic dimensions of this shift, occurred when the Cold War was gradually drawing to a close in the 1970s and 1980s. The state's role changed from being a central economic actor (keynesianism), to operating as the ultimate regulator of private activity. Social relations and movements became henceforth mediated by market relations, rather than by the so-called 'rigid' pillarized structures of Belgian pacification democracy. This process was

discursively legitimized by the refurbished thesis on 'the end of ideology'.⁶⁰ The impact of supranational institutions, such as the EU, would gradually subject these social movements to increased competition and institutional requirements.

The aforementioned social-cultural (and economic) dynamics surface time and again in our authors' contributions. While circumventing the rigid framework of détente-oriented relations with Romania, OVR [documents], for instance, "proudly presented" the "support from the European Community". Herrera Crespo's article thus shows that OVR could be considered a precursor to developments that have almost become commonsensical in our time.

Precursors of a totally different kind, however, arguably merit some introduction. Geostrategic policies, that went back to the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935, gave communist parties all over Europe an opportunity to set up extra-political organisational structures. The influence of these structures was two-fold. It allowed the development of a new conceptual language beyond the confines of party-political ideologies, while offering communist parties a means to overcome their more general social and cultural isolation. This conceptual language reinvigorated much older debates on, for instance, pacifism and feminism or helped to raise awareness regarding relatively new societal phenomena such as racism and antisemitism. Through the 'Popular Front policies', initiated by the Comintern, these debates were cast in the light of the broader emancipatory struggles of European democracy under siege from fascism. The mere existence of these organisational structures created a social-cultural dynamic that lasted through both the highly controversial Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact as well as the Nazi Occupation. 'Popular Front policies' in fact resurfaced through the *Front de*

57. Here is not the place to develop this any further, but we are among others referring to the concept of 'spiritual power': GARETH STEDMAN-JONES, "Religion and the origins of socialism", in GARETH STEDMAN-JONES & IRA KATZNELSON (eds.), *Religion and the Political Imagination*, Cambridge, 2010, 171-189.

58. A scholarly history of the Masereelfonds is still needed. See nevertheless LUDO ABICHT, *Het Masereelfonds: 50 jaar contrair in L'idee, verbeeld de toekomst*, Berchem, 2021, 16-47.

59. JAAK BILLIET, "Van verwerpelijke verzuiling naar geprezen middenveld", *Tijdschrift voor Sociologie*, 25/1, 2004, 140-141.

60. HOWARD BRICK, *The End of Ideology Thesis in: The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, Oxford, 90-112.

l'Indépendance/Onafhankelijkheidsfront and the communist-led struggle for so-called 'national independence'. A discursive device that drew socialists and liberals into its sphere of influence and subsequently buttressed communist participation in post-war governments all over Europe. With the advent of the Cold War, the Belgian communist party rapidly lost its political lustre, while the aforementioned social-cultural dynamic was recast along the lines of the Zhdanov-doctrine (USSR, 1946-Cominform, 1947). The *Union des femmes de Belgique* was dissolved in 1946 and unsurprisingly replaced by the *Rassemblement des femmes pour la paix* in 1948.⁶¹ The Manicheism of the Zhdanov-doctrine even spawned Belgium's very own and infamous 'Lyssenko Affair' at the *Université Libre de Bruxelles*.⁶² Notwithstanding the party's so-called 'de-Stalinization' in 1954, its appeal had waned in academic circles (ULB) by 1956.⁶³ Through its so-called 'mass organisations' (*organisations de masse*) the party would nonetheless exert significant influence on both international solidarity and peace movements from the 1950s onward.⁶⁴

These were not mere 'front organizations' but structures, which in their own right, could (in)directly serve as public diplomacy tools for the USSR. This brings us straight to what was mentioned elsewhere regarding the Communist Party that began to operate as a, break-even, public diplomacy tool through its commercial activities. Both these commercial activities and 'mass organisations' were obviously inextricably linked. Former secretary-general of the KPB-PCB (1936-1943), Xavier Relecom, was at once the mastermind behind the party's commer-

cial activities as well as the director of the 'Union belge pour la défense de la Paix' (UBDP) around 1950. As early as 1957, Relecom would create an 'economic commission' within another 'mass organization': *Les Amitiés Belgique-Chine*. In 1963 he would side with schismatic 'Maoist', Jacques Grippa, and leave Tracosa for the aforementioned Sodexim.⁶⁵ The strength of these 'mass organisations' in this regard, lay precisely in their successful ability to serve as 'autonomous' and 'credible' advocates for their respective causes. Seen that way, these organisations would also become an integral part of the policies of the long détente as they were implemented, with regular intervals, from the end of the 1950s onward.⁶⁶

In countries with relatively strong communist parties, such as France and Italy, these policies of détente would in turn inspire the political line of 'Eurocommunism' that would endure from the 1970s into the 1980s. In many ways, 'Eurocommunism' was yet another refurbished version of the 'Popular Front policies' of the 1930s. In coalescence with the aforementioned -and decades old-social-cultural dynamic however, the policies of 'Eurocommunism' would -often with the support of anti-institutional Maoists- ultimately dissolve into Green Parties. These parties indeed began to emerge in such countries as Germany (1980), France (1983) and the Netherlands (1989-1991).⁶⁷

Belgium presents a slightly different picture, but 'mass organizations' and communist militants could still be of social-cultural significance through public discourse, thus furthering the politicization

61. SIGRID VERTOMMEN, "Hoe de KPB het feminisme links liet liggen. De emancipatiegraad van de vrouw in de Kommunistische Partij van België, 1921-1991", *Brood & Rozen*, 13/3, 2016, 28-47. On West European communism: DONALD SASSOON, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century*, London, 2014, 83-113. On the Communist International: SERGE WOLIKOW, "Aux origines de la galaxie communiste: l'Internationale", in MICHEL DREYFUS, BRUNO GROPPPO et al., *Le siècle des communismes*, Paris, 2000, 199-216.

62. LOREN GRAHAM, *Science in Russia and the Soviet Union*, Cambridge, 1993, 121-134. On the 'Lyssenko Affair' in Belgium: DAN KOTEK & JOEL KOTEK, *L'affaire Lyssenko*, Bruxelles, 1986, 175-195.

63. EVA SCHANDEVYLL, *Tussen revolutie en conformisme: het engagement en de netwerken van linkse intellectuelen in België, 1918-1956*, Brussel, 2012, 287-292.

64. CHRISTIAENS, *Voorbij de 1968-historiografie?*, 282-284.

65. JOSÉ GOTOVITCH, « Xavier Relecom » in *Nouvelle Biographie Nationale*, 303-308.

66. AXELLE BRODIEZ-DOLINO, *Le Secours populaire français, 1945-2000*, Paris, 2006, 91-109.

67. EMMANUEL RIVAT, "The continuity of transnational protest: The anti-nuclear movement as a precursor to the Global Justice Movement", in CRISTINA FLESHER FOMINAYA et al. (eds.), *Understanding European Movements*, London, 2013, 70.

and institutionalisation of environmental and ethical issues. The boundaries between the 'new left' and 'pillarized' working-class movements became permeable in the process. Pillarized movements could, however, exert pressure on their respective political parties. Through legislative initiatives this could eventually further the agenda of, for instance, the different women's movements.

Leen Van Molle has argued how remarkably successful proponents of the 'Second Feminist Wave' were, at downplaying the importance of their 'pillarized' counterparts.⁶⁸ Their demands were strikingly similar to what neutral, catholic, socialist and liberal women's organisations had been advocating for decades. Only their stands on abortion and even intrafamily violence, however, were more often than not deemed too radical. The 'new women's movement' (i.e. *Dolle Mina*, 1970) also had a marketing penchant, though, for spectacular interventions and humorous slogans, deliberately courting media attention. This short-lived cocktail ultimately served as an accelerant which put issues like the social and sexual emancipation of women firmly on the political agenda in both form and content.⁶⁹

The ties between Dolle Mina and the subsequent Fem-Soc groups (1977-1990s) are well documented. PVDA and RAL militants were among their most prolific members.⁷⁰ Both movements, however, also counted individual members of the Communist Party in their ranks.⁷¹ Around the same time a 'women's commission' was re-founded within the party. It has been argued that the commission was unable to leave "a lasting mark",

due to an alleged "lack of interest" from the party leadership.⁷² It is more than likely, however, that the mere involvement of its militants in the 'new women's movement' was precisely what the party was aiming for. Recent scholarship on the entangled histories of feminism and the global Cold War could be highly illuminating in this regard.⁷³

The post-war debate over birth control, family planning and the right to abortion was introduced gradually across a broad spectrum of feminisms in Belgium. As early as 1945 the socialist women's movement (FPS-SVV) wanted to liberalise the Belgian legislation on birth control. In the second half of the 1950s they worked closely together with the Belgian Association for Sexual Education (BVSU), founded by former communist and member of a Second World War resistance group Lucien De Coninck. Awareness regarding birth control methods was considered an appropriate tool for tackling abortion.⁷⁴ These debates regarding sexual emancipation became part of a broader feminist agenda following the signing of the Treaty of Rome (1957). Article 119 of the Treaty unambiguously advocated the principle of 'equal work, equal pay'. It created a fascinating interplay between the radical and more traditional currents of the 1960's-70's working class movement.⁷⁵ It is often left unmentioned, but dissident communists played a decisive role in the famous women's strike for equal pay at FN Herstal in 1966.⁷⁶ They stood at the very beginning of what would eventually be referred to as the Second Feminist Wave. In 1963, Jacques Yerna called for the first FGTB Commission on Women's Work since... 1946. The wildcat strike at FN Herstal took friend and foe

68. LEEN VAN MOLLE, "De nieuwe vrouwenbeweging in Vlaanderen, een andere lezing", *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, 34/3, 2004, 371-375.

69. Ibidem. 390-392.

70. Ibidem 361-362.

71. VERTOMMEN, "Hoe de KP het feminisme links liet liggen".

72. Ibidem, 39.

73. See for instance: "Special Issue: Women's Rights and Global Socialism", *International Review of Social History*, 67/1, 2022.

74. On the post-war influence of the Resistance: JAN NAERT, "'Onze strijd is niet ten einde'. Het Gentse Onafhankelijkheidsfront tijdens en na de Tweede Wereldoorlog", *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, 45/2-3, 2015, 128; NIELS DE NUTTE, "Vrijzinnigheid: Post-War Humanism in Flanders", in NIELS DE NUTTE & BERT GASENBEEK, *Looking back to look forward*, Brussels, 2019, 52-53. The importance of the BVSU is referenced in VAN MOLLE, "De nieuwe vrouwenbeweging in Vlaanderen", 370.

75. MARIE-THÉRÈSE COENEN, *La grève des femmes de la F.N. en 1966: Une première en Europe*, Bruxelles, 1991.

76. This dynamic is often represented somewhat one-sidedly, see MARIJKE VAN HEMELDONCK, "De vrouwenstaking van Herstal (1966): In België startschot van het moderne feminisme, in Europa grondslag van het EU-gelijkheidsrecht", *Brood & Rozen* 11/1, 2006, 45-51.

by surprise and was quickly recognized by the socialist union (FGTB). Its emblematic spokeswoman was Germaine Martens ('La Petite Germaine'), a militant of Jacques Grippa's schismatic Maoist party.⁷⁷ Along with other militants she set up a so-called *comité d'action* which openly defied the existing discriminatory collective conventions. This set in motion an upward social-cultural spiral on which 'Dolle Mina' would more spectacularly capitalize. On a similar note, societal debates over contraceptives and abortion would become part of this feminist struggle, following the arrest of the gynaecologist, and life-time member of the Communist Party, Dr Willy Peers in 1973. A broad spectrum of often rival left and far-left groups crucially politicized the depenalization of abortion, which was eventually passed into law in 1990.⁷⁸ It allowed 'traditional' women's movements, with ties to the Christian Workers' Movement, to ultimately serve as successful vectors of social and political change.⁷⁹ Feminism became fully institutionalized in the process, which has in turn rightfully come under critical scholarly scrutiny in recent times.⁸⁰ All this shows that a 'pillarized'-perspective should take the broader social-cultural dynamic between far-left groups and the PCB-KPB- and beyond more seriously.

IV. Conclusion

In any event, the economic and social-cultural dynamics that we have sketched were intimately connected, and came into play well before the

inception of the Cold War of the late 1940's. In this regard, it is probably no coincidence that the Popular Front policies of the 1935 Comintern Congress, while setting in motion long-lasting social-cultural change, also initiated trade relations between East and West that decisively shaped the material and political world of Cold War Belgium. One of the editors of this theme issue has recently proposed to more elaborately study anticommunism as a fruitful perspective to capture the ideas and practices of large segments of Belgian society during the Cold War. At the same time, however, he had to acknowledge that this prism fails to take into account those leftist movements which were not anti-communist but opposed its Soviet incarnation.⁸¹ Having shown that the study of these movements provides an indispensable and more comprehensive picture of Cold War Belgium, the conclusion to this theme issue has not only indicated pathways for further research, but has also served as a critical engagement with previous literature discussions. As such, this conclusion has – somewhat unorthodoxly – drawn full circle. More importantly, however, we hope that it will function as a source of inspiration to rethink the ties between the Global Cold War and Belgium. This could emancipate Belgian historiography from the national, pillarized perspective it has been caught in for way too long. Historians should arguably do more than provide the historiographical footnotes to what remains of Belgian pacification democracy. Moving beyond a guileless understanding of the relation between 'ideology' and 'organisation' would be a huge leap forward.

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77. <https://maitron.fr/spip.php?article179504>, notice MARTENS Germaine, dite la petite Germaine, par Renée Dresse - Lionel Vanvelthem, version mise en ligne le 23 mars 2016, dernière modification le 28 février 2020.

78. RIK HEMMERIJCKX & LUDWINE SOUBRY, *Jo Boute: Een leven in dienst van de vrouw*, Gent, 2004.

79. MARIE DENIS & SUZANNE VAN ROKEGHEM, *Le féminisme est dans la rue (Belgique 1970-1975)*, Bruxelles, 1992, 19-22; JULIETTE MASQUELIER, *Action catholique et émancipation féminine en Belgique francophone (1955-1990)*, Bruxelles, 2021, 148-149.

80. ALEXANDRA ANA, *The NGOization of Social Movements in Neoliberal Times. Gender and Politics*, London & New York, 2024, 77-109.

81. AUWERS, "Koele minnaars", 51-63.