

THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN BELGIUM: 75 YEARS OF HISTORY (1944-2019)

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Between 1944 and 2019, the history of the German occupation of Belgium during the Second World War has been an object of political mobilization, a source for collective memory construction, a moral yardstick, a field full of academic opportunities and a source for commercial gain. Belgian historians have been authoritative gatekeepers of the past, active participants in volatile cultural processes or frustrated bystanders on the side lines of public memories. This article tackles Belgian historiography and historians of the Second World War against their changing societal backdrop. It does not give an exhaustive bibliographical overview nor a holistic analysis of public memories but rather an impressionistic bird's eye view on 75 years of writing the history of the Second World War in Belgium.

I. Fragmented Foundations (1945-1967)¹

Scattered archives

The single most frequently used term to describe the legacy of the Second World War (WWII) in Belgium is probably 'divided'. This mostly indicates the failure of any actor, the Belgian state most notably, to create anything resembling a dominant national narrative based on the experience of Nazi occupation. The Dutch – with a state sponsored WWII institute created as early as May 1945 – are often presented as Belgium's counter example². Nevertheless, Belgium almost followed the Dutch model. Shortly before the liberation, the Brussels historian Suzanne Tassier (clandestinely) called for the creation of a "Belgian World War Museum" and this idea was supported by her colleagues at the *Université Libre de Bruxelles* (ULB)³. That this new national institute would merge both World Wars made historical sense but was mostly a strategic choice⁴. A viable national institute had to transcend politically divisive claims – for example of some resistance movements – and needed to be inclusive and vague enough to get political support for an idea that clearly came from leftist secular circles in Brussels. In short: it needed the unifying legitimacy of the First World War's patriotic legacy⁵. Indeed, the national political elite in 1945 simply

seemed to apply the patriotic narrative tropes of the First World War (WWI) – national suffering and sacrifice, military heroism and victory – to the recent German occupation⁶. That this was not an unwise approach was proven by the project's broad political and private support⁷. Greenlighted by the ministry of Education, all political parties (except the Communist Party) supported the proposition of law for this new national World Wars Institute in January 1945. The text was steeped in an inclusive patriotism, with the overarching aim of civic national education. After an overwhelming approval – quite a unique display of unity among Catholics and seculars, Flemish and Francophones, progressive and conservatives – the government on 18 May 1945 confirmed the decision.

This decisiveness proved short-lived. In 1946, the government refused to approve this new museum's funding, citing budgetary reasons. In a typical Belgian model of decision-making, the institute was put in limbo for several years, giving it ample time to wither away by itself before the (semi-)official decision to pull the plug was taken in July 1953⁸.

The main reason behind this quick reversal in 1945 was the emerging 'Royal Affair', the explosive political crisis that turned supporters of the new museum into fierce political opponents overnight. But this was not the only reason. The expe-

1. The editing of this article was financed by the University of Liège (*Unité de recherche Traverses*). I am also indebted to the comments made on a draft of this article by (in alphabetical order) Koen Aerts, Francis Balace, Bruno Benvindo, Bruno De Wever, Chantal Kesteloot, Catherine Lanneau, Dirk Luyten and Etienne Verhoeven.

2. The Dutch initiative - the *Rijksinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie* ('State Institute for War Documentation') – was followed by Germany in 1950 with the *Deutsches Institut für die Geschichte der national-sozialistischen Zeit*, and in France in 1951 with its *Comité d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale*.

3. SUZANNE TASSIER, *L'histoire de la Guerre Mondiale. Pour un Musée de la Guerre Mondiale et un Office de Documentation contemporaine*, Bruxelles, 1944. Among others the young 'Pirenist' historian Jean Stengers and the more established Georges Smets, director of the *Institut de Sociologie Solvay*, were early supporters.

4. It was also based on an existing institute studying the First World War, that published the *'Revue belge des livres, documents et archives de la guerre 1914-1918'* between 1924-1953.

5. MARNIX BEYEN, *Oorlog en Verleden. Nationale geschiedenis in België en Nederland, 1938 -1947*, Amsterdam, 2002, p. 246-251.

6. Emerging commemorative practices would quickly echo and reinforce this. The traditional narrative of national heroism and sacrifice was, in a slightly modernized form, applied to WWII in school textbooks until the 1950s. ELS WITTE, *Voor vrede, democratie, wereldburgerschap en Europa: Belgische historici en de naoorlogse politiek-ideologische projecten (1944-1956)*, Kapellen, 2009. (Reference: p. 247).

7. MARNIX BEYEN, *Oorlog en verleden (...)*, p. 251.

8. For years, visitors could visit the *Exposition permanente de documents relatifs à l'histoire de Belgique* on Wednesdays and Saturdays to view some archival documents. PHILIP VAN DEN HEUVEL, *Geschiedenis van een Federale Wetenschappelijke Instelling: Het Studie- en Documentatiecentrum Oorlog en Hedendaagse Maatschappij*, Unpublished MA-Thesis, UGent, 2010 (p. 21-32).

rience of WWII had further weakened the foundations of the Belgian nation-project⁹. The new institute was also woefully underprepared. Where in the Netherlands the creation of the RIOD in May 1945 had been the result of difficult preparatory talks between major Dutch academics, this new Belgian institute simply lacked sufficient academic consensus¹⁰. Most notably, the relationship with this upstart institution and both the State Archives as well as the well-established Royal Army Museum had remained too ambiguous.

As pre-war elites returned as post-war elites, their inability to transcend the traditional divides returned as well. Using the resistance as a basis for a renewed national narrative was unattainable¹¹. The Belgian state applied its traditional non-interventionist mode of government to history and memory policy, meaning it delegated responsibility to intermediate bodies creating a soon-to-be fragmented field of separate memory communities¹². After the botched attempt to create a new national institute in 1945, the Royal Affair also effectively destroyed any political will to engage the state in grand WWII programmes for many years¹³.

The many (semi-)state structures created during the occupation were abolished by the decree-law of 5 May 1944¹⁴. Many archives of occupation-administrations however were necessary for post-war

governance and remained integrated in existing administrations. Assets of abolished collaboration administrations – including their archives – were put under state-sequester. They were tied to financial retributions, so these assets and archives could stay there for many years¹⁵. The Belgian state also created (or expanded) a whole set of new administrations, services and commissions after the liberation to manage reconstruction and compensate for war damages, to punish and sanction collaborators and war criminals (through military courts), to search for missing persons and to repatriate Belgians abroad, to offer official recognition for resistance fighters and for the restitution of war victims. Among others were the ‘Belgian War Crimes Commission’ (BCWC, created on 21 December 1944), the ‘Central Service for War Crimes’ (SCWC) and the ‘Belgian Commissariat for Repatriation’ (June 1944) which would quickly become the Ministry for War Victims¹⁶. This ‘transitional governance’ collected a mass of occupation-archives but also created new archives themselves. For some issues – such as missing persons – this data-collection would continue for decades.

A national ‘World Wars Institute’ created in 1945 might have served as a central gathering point for these essential WWII archives. As Belgium’s first archival law was only voted in 1955, a legal void regarding recent public archives was perpetuated

9. GUSTAVE VAN GEYT, FELIX ROUSSEAU, GEORGE SMETS, “The Flemings and the Walloons”, in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, CCXLVII, september 1946, p. 131.

10. ANNEMIEKE VAN BOCKXMEER, *De oorlog verzameld. Het ontstaan van de collectie van het NIOD*, Amsterdam, 2014.

11. MARNIX BEYEN, *Oorlog en verleden (...)*, p. 264. Indeed, the basis for this traditional patriotism was weak in 1945 and would rather quickly be replaced by a modern post-1945 memorial narrative where “patriotic uniformity” was replaced by “localism and diversity”. MARTIN CONWAY, “The End(s) of Memory. Memories of the Second World War in Belgium”, in *JBH* XLII, 2012 nr. 2/3, p. 170-187.

12. BRUNO BENVINDO and EVERT PEETERS, “La mémoire de la seconde guerre mondiale comme régulation sociale. Une perspective Belge”, in *JBH*, 2012, nr. 2/3, p. 10-19.

13. JOSÉ GOTOVITCH, “Problèmes de l’historiographie de la Belgique pendant la Seconde Guerre Mondiale”, in *Septentrion*, 3, 1976, p. 6; PIETER LAGROU, “Historiographie de guerre et historiographie du temps présent: cadres institutionnels en Europe occidentale (1945-2000)”, in *Bulletin - Comité international d’histoire de la 2^{ème} guerre mondiale*, 2008, p. 191-215 (reference p. 203).

14. On the 5 May 1945 law and its implementation: LUC VANDEWEYER, “Oorlogsinstellingen liquideren. De vereffeningsadministratie na September 1944 en de archiefvorming. Een verkennend onderzoek”, in MICHEL VAN DER EYCKEN en ERIK HOUTMAN (eds.), *Lach: liber amicorum Coppens Herman*, Brussel, 2007, p. 451-481. See also: Ibidem, “De archieven van het ministerie van Financiën”, in PIERRE-ALAIN TALLIER (ed.), *In de nasleep van de Tweede Wereldoorlog. Beschikbare bronnen en stand van het onderzoek*, Brussel, 2011, p. 57-75.

15. The central administration responsible for liquidation was itself abolished only by the end of the 1960s.

16. PATRICK NEFORS, *Inventaris van het archief van de Dienst voor de Oorlogsslachtoffers*, Brussel, 1997. See also: MAURICE-PIERRE HERREMANS, *Personnes déplacées (rapatriés, disparus, réfugiés)*, Marie-Julienne, 1948.

for ten years after the liberation. And even in 1955, the Belgian State Archives remained mostly focused on (pre-)modern archives. It was telling that Etienne Sabbe, the general director of the Belgian State Archives from 1955-1968, decided on the transfer of essential archives related to WWI (and to a lesser extent WWII) to a depot in Saint-Hubert in highly unfit circumstances¹⁷. The Royal Army Museum on the other hand, would focus its archival policy on pre-1940 archives.

Nevertheless, in early 1953 the Central Office of the Chief Military Prosecutor – apparently on the initiative of P. Cassiers, a substitute of the Chief Military Prosecutor – took the initiative to prepare the transfer of certain WWII archives. This transfer effectively started in 1955 – after the Belgian archival law was voted – and would continue until July 1959 (after which it suddenly stopped)¹⁸. These fragmented archives mostly concerned so-called “conviction documents” (*overtuigingstukken/ pièces à conviction*). This was a fragmented collection of heterogeneous documents used as evidence to build judicial cases against collaborators or collaborating organisations. In 1961, archivist René Boumans gave this fragmented collection its first archival description, the (in historical circles legendary) ‘Boumans-List’¹⁹. This unorthodox procedure of transfer created a large fragmentation of these essential archives²⁰. One of the first larger WWII collections to be inventoried was the

archives of the ‘Central-Commissariat for Prices and Wages’. This archive was transferred to the State Archives in May 1963 and the inventory was published in 1970²¹.

To summarise: Belgium lacked an archival policy for WWII archives for decades. This created ample time for essential archives to become fragmented and even partly destroyed before any type of description occurred. This would have lasting consequences. Even in 1999 for example, archivist Griet Maréchal had to conclude that most of the work to inventory the historically essential sequester-archives had to start, but that important parts of the archives – at that moment still residing in a site of the Ministry of Finances – had disappeared²².

The ‘Inter-University Centre for Contemporary History’ was born out of a mutual ‘sense of urgency’ regarding these records in the National State Archives and with the main professors in contemporary history²³. It was created on 4 June 1955 and received modest funding in 1956²⁴. Its main objective was not research (or education) but safeguarding archival and other sources, with a self-imposed mission to identify and select, to inventory printed source material, to create source registers for research, and to publish essential sources²⁵. Noteworthy for the historiography of WWII, was the reflection that John Gillissen (see further) published in 1957. It is perhaps the earliest stra-

17. Information transferred to the author on 28 February 2019 by Luc Vandeweyer, archivist at the Belgian State Archives.

18. “Algemeen Rijksarchief”, *Archives of the Central Office of the Chief Military Prosecutor, legger 94.245*.

Information transferred to the author on 28 February 2019 by Luc Vandeweyer, archivist.

19. *Idem*.

20. LAWRENCE VAN HAECKE, “De archieven van het militair gerecht voor de studie van de repressie van collaboratie na de Tweede Wereldoorlog”, in PIERRE-ALAIN TALLIER, *In de nasleep (...)*, p. 75-101.

21. E-mail dd. 28 February 2019 to the author by Luc Vandeweyer, archivist at the Belgian State Archives.

22. GRIET MARÉCHAL, “Vijanden en verdachten. Het archief van het Sekwester na de Tweede Wereldoorlog”, in *Docendo Discimus. Liber Amicorum Romain Van Eenoo*, Gent, 1999, p. 57-73. See also: LUK VANDEWEYER, *De archieven van het ministerie van Financiën (...)*, p. 64-66.

23. The creation of this centre coincided with the signing of the first archival law on 24 June 1955 (the proposal of law was submitted in 1953). A. COSEMANS, “Rapport sur les archives de l’histoire contemporaine conservées dans les dépôts publics”, in *Ibidem*, p. 11-19.

24. Its board of directors were: G. Jacquemyns (president, Brussels University), J. Dhondt (secretary, Ghent University), Henri Haag (member, Leuven University) and R. Demoulin (member, University of Liège).

25. *Centre Interuniversitaire d’Histoire Contemporaine/Interuniversitair Centrum voor Hedendaagse Geschiedenis, Cahiers // Mededelingen I*, Leuven/Paris, 1957. The Royal Commission for History would have to add another volume to their source publications, related to Belgium from 1939-1945: “recueils de documents, relatifs à la situation intérieure de la Belgique pendant la période 1939-1945”.

tegic note on one of the main archival source collections of WWII, notably the ca. 400,000 files of the archives of the military courts concerning the post-war punishment of collaboration²⁶. In a remarkably matter-of-fact tone, Gilissen proposed to destroy “a very large number” of these archives and to subsequently transfer the small remaining part to the State Archives, something he estimated to be done by 1980. Gilissen saw no historical value in the archives of the majority of ‘ordinary’ petty collaborators.

The idea of inter-university cooperation foreshadowed the Research and Study Centre for the History of the Second World War (1969) and brought together scholars and archivists who would later play an essential role (like Jean Stengers and Jacques Willequet, who were both present at the first meeting that would lead to the aforementioned centre on 27 April 1954)²⁷.

The absent historian: the era of the witness and the state sponsored expert (1950s-1960s)

Contemporary history had been part of the Belgian University curricula since 1890. It temporarily took flight after 1918 but was reduced to a secondary role after 1929²⁸. The full institutionalization of

contemporary history only came gradually after 1945²⁹. Of the 46 PhD Belgian theses in history between 1945 and 1970, only one was exclusively devoted to the 20th century (but on a foreign subject matter)³⁰. This does not mean that the ca. 85 actively publishing Belgian academic historians between 1945-1951 chose to ‘flee’ in medieval studies or the *longue durée*³¹. They did support the dissemination of ideas such as liberal democracy, human rights, pluralism, and the importance of scientific knowledge for society and European reconciliation³². But as a consensual group characterised by a certain ‘common sense’ they carefully avoided direct involvement in present day struggles³³. This meant they only touched the history of WWII in the relative safe environment of state commissioned history³⁴. As such, historians played only a minor role during this period. Also, there was no scholarly historic journal stimulating an output about WWII. Scholarly articles related to WWII were published in either Belgian journals of other disciplines (such as the *Revue de Droit pénal et de Criminologie*) or in the French journal *Revue d'histoire de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale* (published by the *Presses Universitaires de France* between 1950 and 1981).

Other academic disciplines – sociology, legal studies, economic- or political sciences – had less reservations. The first scholarly works on WWII were published in 1945 by Fernand Baudhuin

26. J. GILISSEN, “Rapport relative à l’utilisation des archives des juridictions militaires pour l’étude de l’histoire de la période 1939-1945”, in *Centre Interuniversitaire (...)*, p. 35-39.

27. Jean Stengers (1922-2002) was a specialist in colonial history. He became full professor at ULB in 1954, in 1967 he succeeded Guillaume Jacquemyns at the head of the contemporary history seminars of ULB and in 1980 he became member of the scientific committee of the CWWII. Jacques Willequet (1914-1990) was a specialist in Belgian’s international relations policies. He became full professor at ULB in 1966. He also held a position of advisor in international relations to the Belgian Foreign Office.

28. MARNIX BEYEN, *Oorlog en verleden (...)*, p. 389; BRUNO BENVINDO, BENOÎT MAJERUS and ANTOON VRIJTS, “La Grande Guerre des historiens belges, 1914-2014”, in *JBH*, 2014, 2/3, p. 170-196.

29. Partly caused by a generation shift, with full professors such as Guillaume Jacquemyns (1877-1969, ULB), Robert Demoulin (1911-2008, Liège), Jan Dhondt (1915-1972, Ghent), Jean Stengers (see above); historians with a part-time assignment such as Henri Haag (1917-2011, Leuven), John Bartier (1915-1908, ULB) and Jacques Willequet (see above), as well as clergy historians such as Aloïs Simon (1897-1964, Leuven) and Karel van Iscaker (1913-2010, Antwerp). ELs WITTE, *Voor vrede (...)*, p. 50.

30. LUC FRANÇOIS, *De vele gezichten van de nieuwste geschiedenis*, Gent, 2003. p. 437-45.

31. ELs WITTE, *Voor vrede (...)*, p. 309.

32. Research questions into the deeper social origins of war and conflict, for example, expressed this. ELs WITTE, *Voor vrede (...)*, p. 321.

33. MARNIX BEYEN, *Oorlog en verleden (...)*, p. 391-392.

34. ELs WITTE, *Voor vrede (...)*, p. 319.



John Gilissen during his visit of the Research Centre for the Study of the Second World War on 26 November 1973. Gilissen (1912-1988) was professor at the Brussels University (from 1938) and first substitute of the Chief Military Prosecutor. He did ground breaking scholarly work on the study of the post-war purges and convictions of collaborators. In 1957 he had proposed to destroy the large majority of individual files of convicted collaborators from the archives of the military courts because – in his view – these held no historical interest. Source : CegeSoma.

(Catholic University of Leuven) and Guillaume Jacquemyns (ULB).

Fernand Baudhuin (1894-1977), one of Belgium's foremost economists who during the 1930s had been an advisory to several governments, published his book on the Belgian economy under occupation in 1945³⁵. Baudhuin could make use of his personal network to access essential information. His book tackled different economic sectors (industries, crafts, commercial distribution), the financial and monetary evolution, the evolution of prices and wages and food supply. Baudhuin strongly defended the occupation policies of Belgian authorities (with the exception of secretary-general De Winter of Food Supply and Agriculture whom he strongly attacked in his preface). As such, he canonised the patriotic interpretation of the Belgian 'policy of the lesser evil', the policy of economic and administrative cooperation under occupation.

The Brussels sociologist Guillaume Jacquemyns started doing sociological survey-research in February 1941 about the living conditions of Walloon workers in the industrial areas, tasked by Alexandre Galopin, the leading captain of industry in occupied Belgium³⁶. The underlying aim was concern about social upheaval. After the liberation, Jacquemyns used this material for his first publication in 1945 and his 1950 monumental three-volume study (published by the *Institut de Sociologie*) on

the working class during the occupation³⁷. Deeply empirical, the study tackled material living conditions but also physical, social and mental impact of material deprivation. Jacquemyns also did a lot of work those years commissioned by the Huysmans-government about food supply³⁸. In fact, food supply under occupation was (together with legal studies) one of the first essential topics of historical study between 1945-1951, exactly because Belgium faced similar problems after 1945³⁹.

An enormous judicial research effort was done in the framework of the military justice offices preparing the hundreds of thousands of post-war judicial inquests (while public administrations and commissions did the same for administrative sanction procedures). Hundreds of experts were commissioned, mostly to analyse the accountancy of private enterprises or financial institutions under occupation, or to further develop legal understanding. In 1946, Gerda De Bock published a socio-criminology research on the women's ward of the internment centre in Ghent⁴⁰. The most essential scholar in this field was the aforementioned John Gilissen (1912-1988), a professor at the Brussels University (from 1938) and first substitute of the Chief Military Prosecutor (from 1945) who would become one of the single most important voices in Belgian contemporary history during the 1950s. He had unique, direct access to judicial sources and published essential statistical analyses, especially after 1951⁴¹. He also defended

35. FERNAND BAUDHUIN, *L'économie belge sous l'occupation 1940-1944*, Bruxelles, 1945. Baudhuin was a doctor in Legal Studies and Diplomatic Sciences, a specialist in Economic Sciences, a full professor at the Catholic University of Leuven.

36. GUILLAUME JACQUEMYS, *La Société belge sous l'Occupation allemande (1940-1944). Alimentation et état de santé*, Bruxelles, 1950, p. 11.

37. Idem, *La Société belge sous l'Occupation allemande (1940-1944)*, Bruxelles, 3 vol., 1950.

38. Idem, *Les budgets familiaux d'ouvriers et d'employés 1947-1948*, Bruxelles, 1949; Idem, *L'alimentation dans les budgets familiaux 1947-1948*, Bruxelles, 1950; Idem, *Mode de vie des ouvriers 1948-1949 3. L'alimentation*, Bruxelles, 1954.

See: LUIS ANGEL BERNARDO Y GARCIA, *Le Ventre des Belges : miracle économique et restauration des forces de travail. Origines et développement de la politique alimentaire du second immédiat après-guerre (1914-1948)*, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, ULB, 2015, p. 45-66.

39. R. MIRY, *Zwarte handel in levensmiddelen*, Bruxelles, 1946; J. COLARD, *L'alimentation de la Belgique sous l'Occupation Allemande 1940-1944*, Louvain, 1945; J. BLONTRÖCK, *Zeven magere jaren of de historie der Belgische bevoorrading gedurende en na de oorlog 1940-1945*, Bruges, 1950; TEODOZJUSZ CHELMICKI, *Le marché noir*, Louvain, 1950.

40. GERDA DE BOCK, *Incivisme en repressie : een onderzoek in de vrouwenafdeling van het interneringscentrum te Gent*, Antwerpen, 1946.

41. JOHN GILISSEN, "Étude statistique sur la répression de l'incivisme", in *Revue de droit pénal et de criminologie*, Vol. 31, 1951-5, p. 513-628.

ongoing judicial policies, but his published data remained essential until the 1990s and beyond. A major problem, however, was that through his privileged access to sources he gathered archives for himself that afterwards remained closed for other researchers.

The Belgian War Crimes Commission (part of the Ministry of Justice and collaborating closely with the *Service Central des Crimes de Guerre* of the Chief Military Prosecutor's Office) was created by law on 13 December 1944. This commission was mostly comprised of legal scholars and published fourteen reports between 1946 and 1949 on the major war crimes committed on Belgian soil. These reports were in part based on local data surveys⁴². Historian Jean Stengers contributed to the official report on the anti-Jewish policies in occupied Belgium.

Quite another major strand in this early period was witness-account histories⁴³. Early WWII related publications were indeed personal accounts, *mémoires*, pamphlets etc. (a phenomenon also visible after WWI). The most influential was the book by Brussels lawyer and journalist Paul Struye, who in 1945 published his loose surveys and personal observations as a book on public opinion in Belgium under occupation⁴⁴. Another essential example was the four-volume book by Delandsheere and Ooms⁴⁵. A completely different example was the mostly ignored smaller brochure-leaflet published by Jos (Joseph) Hakker in 1944 on the transit camp for deported Jews, *Kazerne Dossin*⁴⁶. In general terms, personal

accounts often came from either collaborators (in exile), from resistance fighters or from victims of Nazi persecution, either to legitimize occupation choices or draw public attention to their plight. Gie Van den Berghé could identify around 500 personal accounts between 1945 and 1993 from Belgians about national socialist camps and prisons (including some from Jews, but a majority from resistance members). 300 of them were in French and about 40% of them were published in the first five years after the liberation⁴⁷. In the rare case of publication, these were often fictionalised stories⁴⁸. In this period, the lines between the scholar and the witness could blur as well. On 4 February 1946, historian Leon van der Essen (1883-1963, Catholic University of Leuven) testified as the only Belgian representative during the proceedings of the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg. He testified on the topics of (among others) German war crimes during the military campaigns in 1940 and 1944-45, the economic exploitation of the country and the deportation of forced labourers. But his testimony was mostly based, not so much on historical research, but rather on his own personal lived experience.

This interconnectedness between scholarly work and witness-histories is most clearly visible in the early history of the resistance. Already in 1945, a commission was created under the auspices of the Ministry of Defence in which historians and members of the resistance would collaborate on a history of the resistance. This quickly proved unworkable. Most historians gradually quit because their scholarly-historical objectives

42. The Belgian War Crimes Commission ended its work on 1 April 1948 and transferred its 'documentation' to the Belgian military justice.

43. CHANTAL KESTELOOT and BRUNO BENVINDO, "Témoins, historiens, Etats: mémoires de la Seconde Guerre mondiale en Belgique (1945-2015)", in JACQUELINE SAINCLIVIER, JEAN-MARIE GUILLON and PIERRE LABORIE (eds.), *Images des comportements sous l'Occupation. Mémoires, transmission, idées reçues*, Rennes, 2016, p. 93-111.

44. PAUL STRUYE, *L'évolution du sentiment public en Belgique sous l'occupation allemande*, Bruxelles, 1945.

45. PAUL DELANDSHEERE et ALPHONSE OOMS, *La Belgique sous les nazis*, Bruxelles, 1941-1947, 4 vol.

46. JOS HAKKER, *De geheimzinnige kazerne Dossin. Deportatiekamp der Joden*, Antwerp, 1944 (also published in French and English).

47. GIE VAN DEN BERGHÉ, *Getuigen, een case-study over ego-documenten. Bibliografie van ego-documenten over de nationaal-socialistische kampen en gevangenen*, Brussel, 1995, 2 vol.

48. For example: HÉLÈNE BEER, *Salle 1*, Bruxelles, 1946. For this 'based on true accounts' novel she won the *Prix littéraire du Prisonnier Politique*.

were in contrast with the approach and aims of resistance representatives⁴⁹. But internal division, certainly between left-wing and right-wing groups, plagued the resistance community as well. The 'golden book of the resistance' published in 1948 was a good example. The book ended up being almost exclusively a witness-account book of right-wing members of the resistance, after the more left-wing groups and all historians (save but two medievalists) abandoned the project⁵⁰. Nevertheless, the resistance would be one of the earliest topics to receive systematic historical research. The latter developed under the umbrella of contemporary military history in the Royal Military Academy. A key figure was Henri Bernard. Under Bernard's supervision, Jean-Léon Charles obtained his PhD in 1962 (ULg, about the Middle Ages) and would quickly hold the chair of History at the Royal Military Academy. Bernard and Charles were both members of the former resistance. They therefore combined the roles of scholars and witnesses. Edouard Frankx, the national leader of the Union of Fraternities of the Secret Army between 1969 and 1988, was also professor at the Academy. These military academics would stimulate young military staff in training to work on the history of the resistance, leading to the very first Master's thesis in Belgium on the resistance⁵¹. Jean-Léon Charles also encouraged the local 'fraternities' to begin collecting source material and witness-accounts, with the aim to create a national resistance history.

The combination of state commissioned experts in support of post-war government policies and witness-accounts was very similar to the trends after WWI⁵². Just like the post-1919 era, the stream of this output also dried out after ten years.

Historiography and public memories ?

In the 1950s and 1960s, historians were therefore mostly absent in the study of WWII. The scholarly work that was done was of a rather technical nature and could be considered "elitist" in its lack of tailoring to a broader audience and subsequently limited resonance in any public arena. Unlike in other countries where WWII rejuvenated the writing of a history that supported the nation and state, such a 'national historiography' was in decline in Belgium. What Henri Pirenne had done after 1918 would clearly not be reproduced after 1945⁵³. In the 1950s, the dominant trend was one of a regionalisation of the academic institutional landscape⁵⁴. A staunch 'Pirenneist' historian such as Jean Stengers for example, refused to cooperate with the (first) *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* (1949-1958)⁵⁵.

Before a field of 'WWII studies' existed in Belgium, a network of Flemish national intellectuals launched systematic historical work in the 1950s that was consciously put in service of Flemish nation-building⁵⁶. To quote historian Bruno De Wever on the Flemish movement: "There is most likely no other move-

49. BRUNO DE WEVER, *Tegendruk : de geheime pers tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, Gent/Brussel/Antwerpen/Gent, 2004.

50. *Livre d'or de la résistance belge*, Bruxelles, 1948. See: CHANTAL KESTELOOT and BRUNO BENVINDO, *Témoins, historiens (...)*.

51. The series of MA-theses was stimulated as well by the decision to grant the graduates of the Royal Military Academy a diploma the equivalent of a University MA-degree (*Sciences Sociales et Militaires*).

52. BRUNO BENVINDO, BENOÎT MAJERUS and ANTOON VRIJNTS, *La Grande Guerre (...)*.

53. When the prominent Ghent historian Jan Dhondt openly attacked 'Pirenneism' in 1966, he confirmed the reality that an evident national Belgian framework had become obsolete. MARNIX BEYEN, *Oorlog en verleden (...)*, p. 404.

54. HERVÉ HASQUIN, *Historiographie et politique en Belgique*, Bruxelles/Charleroi, 1996, (reference: p. 98-99).

55. See: ELS WITTE, *Voor vrede (...)*, p. 64. See also: J.A. HOUTE (et.al., eds.), *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, Utrecht/Antwerpen, p. 1949-1958; M. LAMBERTY (e. a., eds.), *Twintig Eeuwen Vlaanderen*, Hasselt, 1972-1979; H. HASQUIN, R. LEJEUNE and J. STIENNON (eds.), *La Wallonie*, Bruxelles, p. 1975-1981.

56. LOUIS VOS, "Reconstructions of the Past in Belgium and Flanders", in BRUNO COPPIETERS and MICHEL HUYSSSEUNE (eds.), *Secession, History and the Social Sciences*, Brussels, 2002, p. 179-206, (reference: p. 198-199). HERVÉ HASQUIN, *Historiographie (...)*, p. 125-137; KOEN AERTS, "De bestraffing van de collaboratie na de Tweede Wereldoorlog. Beeldvorming en onderzoek", *BTNG/RBHC/BH*, nr. 21 - 2009, p. 65-66.

ment in Belgium where historiography and activism are more strongly interconnected⁵⁷. The work of people like Baudhuin, Jacquemeyns and Gilissen was certainly meant to legitimize Belgian state policies. Their work, however, was technical and aimed at a small circle of experts; they did not try to open a dialogue with the broader public or the media. They were probably not consciously aware that a 'war for memory' was taking shape in which the writing of history could be a powerful tool. Several Flemish nationalist historians, however, were acutely aware of this. They tackled the subject of Flemish nationalist collaboration and (even more) post-war purges head-on, consciously developing a historiography with the full potential of emotional arguments, dramatized personal stories and subjectively constructed arguments⁵⁸. For example, the very technical work published by Gilissen, Cassier and Debroux in 1967 about post-war purges hardly had any public impact⁵⁹. In sharp contrast to this, the Catholic senator Raymond Derine actively used historical work to enhance his political fight for amnesty for convicted collaborators⁶⁰. The emblematic first *Encyclopedia of the Flemish Movement* (1973-1975) would be the accumulated result of this⁶¹. This influential encyclopedia actively defended Flemish-national collaboration and the vision of anti-Flemish post-war repression by the Belgian state and would be considered a standard reference scholarly work for decades.

In short, the Belgian state and its main scholars left the field of WWII-related history wide open to a

Flemish-nationalist historiography during the 1950s and 1960s. This would have a fundamental impact on collective memories and political debates⁶².

II. The National Centre for WWII studies (1967-1989)

A momentum builds (1960s)

Even during the 1950s, patriotic associations – mainly organized in the national 'Contact Committee of Patriotic Associations' (*Contactcomité voor Vaderlandslievende Verenigingen/Comité de Contact des Associations Patriotiques*) – felt increasingly disconnected from political and societal evolutions⁶³. More frustrating than the lack of public recognition, was the acute sense that they were losing the longer-term battle for memory. For these associations, a national civic consciousness in Belgium was tightly connected to a patriotic history of the resistance during WWII. In 1961, with a mitigation of sanction measures against collaborators, the Justice minister Piet Vermeulen appeased the angry patriotic communities by announcing the future creation of a national WWII research centre⁶⁴. But this was hollow window-dressing: no political party had any interest or will to actually do so⁶⁵.

One actor jumped in this gap. In 1959, André Puttemans created the *Société d'Études des Deux Guerres Mondiales*, officially part of the historical

57. Translation by the author. BRUNO DE WEVER, *Greep naar de macht. Vlaams-nationalisme en Nieuwe Orde. Het VNV, 1933-1945*, Tielt/Gand, 1994, p. 15.

58. KOEN AERTS, *De Bestrafing (...)*, p. 55-92.

59. JOHN GILISSEN, PAUL CASSIERS, FRANÇOIS DEBROUX, *Crimes et délits contre la sûreté de l'État*, Brussel, 1967, p. 111-319.

60. RAYMOND DERINE, *Repressie zonder maat of einde? Terugblik op de collaboratie, repressie en amnestiestrijd*, Leuven, 1978.

61. *Encyclopedie van de Vlaamse Beweging*, Tielt/Utrecht, 1973-1975.

62. KOEN AERTS, *Kinderen van de repressie: Hoe Vlaanderen worstelt met de bestrafing van de collaboratie*, Kalmthout, 2018.

63. A national organisation with representatives of the larger organizations of former resistance members, political prisoners, war victims, veterans etc. "L'histoire de l'histoire (3)", in *Bulletin d'Information des Prisonniers Politiques, Résistants et Combattants*, 620 (1968), p. 98; "Note du Comité de Contact des Associations Patriotiques au sujet des relations de ses délégués au groupe de travail avec les représentants du gouvernement", s.d. (eind februari/begin maart 1960), in SOMA AA 692/PF 6 (5).

64. On 31 March 1960, the Belgian state was officially accused before the European Court of Human Rights after a complaint by a convicted collaborator based on article 10 (freedom of speech) of the European Convention on Human Rights. In reaction, Belgian parliament adapted the law in June 1961.

65. *Parlementaire Handelingen, Kamer, buitengewone zitting*, 28 June 1961, p. 13-14.

administration of the Foreign Office⁶⁶. With historian Jacques Willequet as its secretary-general, one of its main objectives was to write 'the' history of the resistance⁶⁷. After Puttemans' early death in 1961, Willequet took this to the next level. With the support of the head of the State Archives Etienne Sabbe, he created a new private association, the "National Centre for the Study of the Two World Wars"⁶⁸. Patriotic associations were less than amused. They felt excluded by the experts. The patriotic community wanted a true state institute where control by the patriotic community would be fixed by law⁶⁹. This was the only way to make sure the patriotic community could act as guardian of the state's 'civic education' duty⁷⁰. Tensions erupted immediately: Willequet felt himself forced to publish a defense of 'his' centre in 1966⁷¹. The successive governments however were quite happy (and relieved) to rely on this private initiative. It received funding in 1964 from the National Science Office (NFWO) and it could

recruit three young researchers, among whom was José Gotovitch (ULB)⁷². The humble beginnings included the early research on separate resistance organizations, participation at an international conference, the first contacts with France and the Netherlands and the first (and only) issue of its own journal in 1967⁷³.

In 1965 however, the acquittal of Belgian war criminal and collaborator Robert Verbelen by an Austrian court created outcry in Belgium. The patriotic community saw this as the inevitable result of the Belgian state's passiveness⁷⁴. This time, the Belgian government was pushed towards action⁷⁵. The government forced the Centre-Willequet and the National Contact Committee to come up with a shared proposition⁷⁶. Following the ministerial decision of 13 December 1967 (the Ministry of National Education) the government created the 'Research and Study Centre for the History of the Second World War' (from now on: CWWII)⁷⁷.

66. André Puttemans was head of the *Fédération des Professeurs d'Histoire*. During the 1950s, he had been the main instigator of the pacifist 'revisionist' movement in history textbooks, aimed at European reconciliation. His attempts to mitigate German historical responsibility for mainly the First World War, did not go over well with patriotic associations and patriotic-minded historians. ELS WITTE, *Voor Vrede* (...), p. 292.

67. "Histoire belge des Deux Guerres", in *Bulletin d'Information* (...), nr. 327, 1960.

68. Together with Henri Bernard (Royal Military School), Emile Lousse (Catholic University Leuven), Léon-Ernest Halkin (Université Libre de Liège) and Jacques de Launay (secretary-general of the International Commission for History Education). Heads of the centre after Willequet would be Victor van Straelen (former director of the Royal Museum of Natural History) and Etienne Sabbe, the National Archivist. DIRK MARTIN, "Het Studie- en Documentatiecentrum Oorlog en hedendaagse Maatschappij", in GITA DENECKERE en BRUNO DE WEVER (ed.), *Geschiedenis maken. Liber amicorum Herman Balthazar*, Gent, 2003, p. 211-226. (reference p. 211).

69. In 1959, the Eyskens-government made a lukewarm attempt, creating a working group comprised of representatives of the state and of the Contact Committee; however, this working group was abolished in 1961 because of disagreement on the creation of a new, permanent state institute. "Note du Comité de Contact des Associations Patriotiques (...)", s.d. (March 1960), SOMA AA 692/PF 6 (5).

70. The ideal would be to revive the defunct Belgian World War Museum (seeing as the text that abolished the institute in 1953 had – in fact – never been published).

71. Willequet to the *Bulletin d'Information* (...) 12 January 1966, SOMA AA 849/372; "Histoire de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale", in *Bulletin d'Information* (...), 1966, nr. 54, p. 17-18; "Un cahier d'histoire de la guerre", in *Ibidem*, nr., 604, 1967, p. 180; "A propos d'un Cahier d'Histoire de la Guerre", in *Ibidem*, nr. 606, 1968.

72. JEAN VANWELKENHUYZEN, *Le Centre de Recherches et d'Etudes Historiques de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale. Traits du passé et du présent*, Bruxelles, 1980; WILLEM MEYERS, "Het Navorsings- en Studiecentrum voor de Geschiedenis van de Tweede Wereldoorlog te Brussel", in *Oorlogsdocumentatie '40-'45. Zesde Jaarboek van het RIOD*, Zutphen, 1995, p. 260-271.

73. Entirely dedicated to the history of WWII. *Cahiers d'histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale/Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis van de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, Brussel, 1967. See also: PHILIP VAN DEN HEUVEL, *Geschiedenis* (...), p. 47.

74. Robert Verbeelen was a Flemish collaborationist, sentenced to death *in absentia* in 1947 in Belgium. He obtained Austrian nationality after the war and was acquitted of war crimes before an Austrian court in 1965.

75. PHILIP VAN DEN HEUVEL, *Geschiedenis* (...), p. 55-66.

76. "Werkplan opgesteld door Jean Vanwelkenhuyzen naar aanleiding van de vergadering van 25 april 1966", 25 May 1966, SOMA AA 692/5; "Mémoire du Comité de Contact des Associations Patriotiques destiné à Monsieur le Premier Ministre", 1 June 1966, SOMA AA 849/372.

77. *Belgisch Staatsblad*, 10.2.1968, nr. 29, p. 1259-1261.

Belgium finally had its national WWII centre, but nevertheless with a peculiar (and a precarious) statute. It was an 'autonomous institute' (a department) within the Belgian State Archives, falling under the direct tutelage of the ministry of National Education, meaning its budget needed to be explicitly approved each year.

The new centre needed to collect, inventory and disclose essential archival documents as well as to implement and stimulate historical research⁷⁸. Its scientific committee could make strategic and potentially operational decisions⁷⁹. This committee was presided by the minister and held eight (later ten) representative members of the patriotic communities (proposed by the National Contact Committee) and six representative members of academia (university professors). The general director of the National Archives was added as a full member⁸⁰. The core-staff of the new CWWII consisted of a director and five scholars.

Jean Vanwelkenhuyzen was (reluctantly) appointed as the first director, eight votes to six, although the patriotic communities had lobbied for the appointment of the outspoken Jean Fosty, journalist and former resistance member⁸¹. Van Welkenhuyzen (who held Master's degrees in Political Sciences and Financial Sciences of the ULB) was at that time an administrator at a private company. But as someone with a keen interest in WWII history, Willequet had involved him in 'his' centre in the early 1960s. Van Welkenhuyzen came from the Francophone Brussels

bourgeoisie and had enough political support to shield the centre from too much direct interventions. He turned out to be a "skillfull lobbyist" (dixit Dirk Martin)⁸². However, he lacked a strong academic profile and his lack of knowledge of Dutch confirmed the image of a 'franco-phone centre' in certain Flemish circles. The first five scholars were: José Gotovitch (ULB), Jean Dujardin (Liège), Herman Balthazar (Ghent), Wim Meyers (Ghent, a researcher who was also the son of a convicted collaborator) and Frans Selleslagh (Leuven), to which four 'freelance'-researchers were added in 1969-1970, the most important of which was Albert De Jonghe (see further)⁸³.

There is further reason to see 1965 as a landmark year. The Flemish part of the Belgian Radio and Television Broadcasting Company (BRTN) – inspired by the success of the Dutch TV-series by Loe De Jong – created their 'production cell Second World War' (*Productiekern Tweede Wereldoorlog*)⁸⁴. It had to produce historical TV-documentaries on WWII (centred on five themes). It was symptomatic for the future problems of the newly created WWII centre that when the BRT after a few years created a scientific committee, they included professors from all Dutch-speaking universities but excluded the new CWWII⁸⁵. This created the surreal – but soon-to-be typically Belgian – situation that two state sponsored institutes were simultaneously launching a similar research effort, disconnected from each other. It seems to indicate that even as early as 1971-72, it made more sense for the Dutch language BRTN to seek help from Flemish univer-

78. Ministerial Decision 13 December 1967, BS 10 February 1968.

79. The old centre-Willequet was abolished in 1968. "La liquidation du premier centre d'histoire", in *Bulletin d'Information* (...), nr. 631, 1968.

80. The academic representatives in the first scientific committee were: Léon-Ernest Halkin (Leuven), Jacques Willequet (Brussels), Jean-Léon Charles (Royal Military Academy), Theo Luykx (State University Ghent), Henri Haag (Leuven) en Jan Craeybeckx (Brussels), Herman Corijn and René Van Santbergen (inspectors of secondary schools) and the director of the National Archives. The director of the institute, as well as representatives of several other ministerial departments, had an advisory role in the committee.

81. DIRK MARTIN, *Het Studie- en Documentatiecentrum* (...), p. 213.

82. *Idem*, p. 216.

83. The other ones were: Jean Fosty (who would study Belgian resistance networks abroad); Georges Hautecler (focussing on Belgian prisoners of war) and Paul-Ernest Joset (focussing on Belgian Congo during the war).

84. VERLE VANDEN DAELN, "Loe De Jong en Maurice De Wilde. Twee oorlogsmonumenten" in *CHTP-BEC*, 2010, nr. 22, p. 161-196.

85. VERLE VANDEN DAELN, *Loe De Jong* (...), p. 169.



Picture taken around 1968 of a young Els de Bens (UGent), sitting in front of a pile of archives while she was conducting her doctorate thesis research on the Belgian daily press under German occupation. The picture was taken in the Saint-Hubert Abbey Depot of the State Archives in Belgium and is one of the few images testifying to the poor conditions in which WWI and WWII archives were preserved for many years. (Source : private collection Els De Bens).



'Highly fragile. Do not move nor place anything on top of it'. A detail of the records of Zender Brussel/ Radio Bruxelles, an early transfer of archives to the newly created Study Centre for the History of the Second World War. (Source : CegeSoma).

sities rather than from a Belgian institute. Later, the BRT did seek help from the centre's individual researchers such as Albert De Jonghe, José Goto-vitch, and later also Dirk Martin, Rudi Van Doorslaer, Wim Meyers and Frans Selleslagh⁸⁶.

A field is launched

The patriotic community in Belgium considered it the task of the newly created institute in 1969 to (finally) construct a patriotic history and memory of the Second World War: an instrument to counteract anti-national narratives, mostly from within the Flemish movement⁸⁷. Ultimately, the centre would not take on this role. The direct power of the patriotic associations over the new centre proved relatively limited⁸⁸. First, the representatives of the patriotic community were often divided among themselves. Second, the creation of a large number of thematic 'commissions' (working groups) helped to distract and thereby partly neutralize the patriotic associations⁸⁹. Third and most importantly, the institute created the space for several strong-willed individuals to implement their own research agenda. Essential in this regard was probably the fact that the new centre did not have a clear government-assignment⁹⁰. It did not need to write 'the national history of the Second World War' (and in fact strategically avoided this task for many decades)⁹¹.

Finally, there was a central reception point in Belgium for WWII archives and documentation. Archi-

vist Luc Vandeweyer wrote: "Simply the existence of this centre was enough to make sure that the State Archives took few initiatives regarding the archives of the Second World War"⁹². The State Archives were perfectly happy to delegate this task to their new 'autonomous department'. The book by Dutch historian Annemieke van Bockxmeer shows clearly how essential the gradual construction of an archival collection was for the scholarly development of the Dutch RIOD (later NIOD)⁹³.

The true core of the new archival collection of the Belgian centre was formed by the transfer of the WWII collection of State Archives depot in Saint-Hubert⁹⁴. But a rigid interpretation of 'state administrations' during the 1960s-1980s continued to exclude many larger archival collections, such as public administrations created during the occupation⁹⁵. Soon, fragmented parts of collections joined, from the military justice archives, American microfilms of German records and private archives of important personalities. The research mission of the new centre – and the individual historians behind it – determined its archival acquisition policy. The centre could play a pioneering role in Belgium for audio-visual archives. In 1970, a sequestered collection of photos of the collaborating *Service International Photographique* (Sipho) was transferred to the centre. Some historians also began to systematically interview important witnesses, laying the groundwork for the current impressive oral history collection⁹⁶. Another early priority was the creation of a the-

86. Historian Veerle Vanden Daelen speculates that Albert De Jonghe's presence at the CWWII made cooperation unacceptable for the BRT (he was a convicted collaborator, see further), but the most important reason probably lay with the institutional competition. Dejonghe would quickly be involved anyway. *Idem*, p. 168. See for example: ALBERT DE JONGHE and MARK VAN DEN WIJNGAERT, *Basistekst van de werkgroep-bestuur van het bezette land*, Brussel, 1971, 2 vol.

87. It was nevertheless repeatedly criticized for being exactly that in the 1970s by some Flemish voices in parliament.

88. DIRK MARTIN, *Het Studie* (...).

89. DIRK MARTIN, *Geschiedenis* (...), p. 6.

90. "De la Seconde Guerre à l'histoire du siècle. Institution reconnue, mais...", in *Le Soir*, 11 February 1997.

91. See also the comment by JEAN STENGERS, "Brèves considerations finales", in *De oorlog doorheen universitair onderzoek en onderwijs*, Brussel, 1990, P. 77-84 (reference p. 78).

92. Translation of the author. LUC VANDEWEYER, *Oorlogsinstellingen* (...), p. 456.

93. ANNEMIEKE VAN BOCKXMEER, *De oorlog* (...).

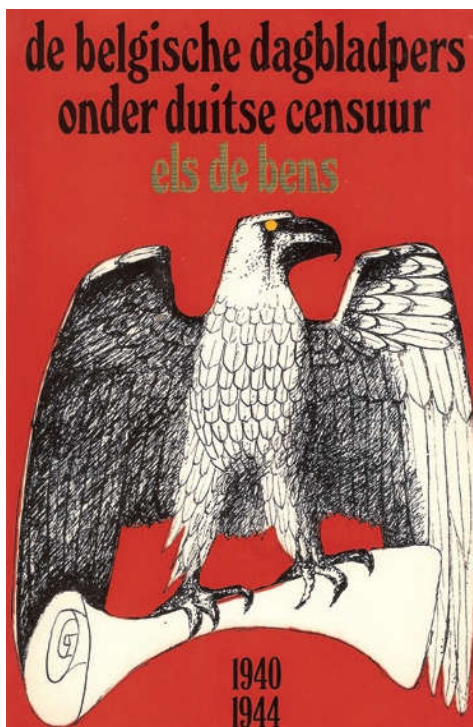
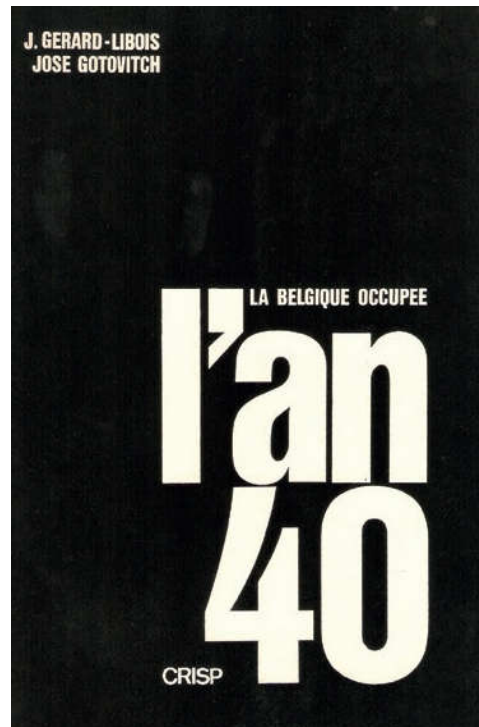
94. DIRK MARTIN, *Het Studie* (...), p. 214.

95. LUC VANDEWEYER, *Oorlogsinstellingen* (...), p. 457.

96. DIRK MARTIN, "De mondelinge documentatie in het Navorsings- en Studiecentrum voor de Geschiedenis van de Tweede Wereldoorlog", in Jan Tolleneer (ed.), *Over mondelinge geschiedenis gesproken*, Antwerpen, 1987, p. 115-128.



A scene during the meeting of the Scientific Committee of the Study Centre for the History of the Second World War on 18 December 1972. The first director Jean Van Welkenhuyzen is seen (third from the left), listening to a member of the committee who does his best to draw the director's attention. Representatives of the patriotic associations had a majority in the first scientific committee. Despite this, they were never able to impose their agenda on the Centre's policies and choices. (Source : CegeSoma).



Hitler en het politieke lot van België (1972) and l'An 40 (1971): two very different books that put WWII-studies on the map as a scholarly field of research in Belgium. Els de Bens' study on the daily press (1973) was the first published doctorate thesis on WWII-history.

matic scientific library. It remains one of the cornerstones of the collection to this day (see the contribution of Alain Colignon in this volume).

The first years saw the centre expand significantly (director Van Welkenhuyzen called this “*le temps des vaches grasses*”) ⁹⁷. It became member of the *Internationaal Comité voor de Geschiedenis van de Tweede Wereldoorlog* and the *Internationaal Comité van Historische Wetenschappen*. The centre also launched its own journal in 1970 ⁹⁸, in addition to its *Bulletin/Berichtenblad* (1969-2014), a yearly communication to inform the ‘broader public’ about the centre’s activities.

The first landmark book was *L’An 40* by José Gotovitch and Jules-Gérard Libois ⁹⁹. The book was a bit of a coincidence. Gotovitch had started his PhD research in the early 1960s about the *Flamenpolitik* during WWI. During these years he gained a large knowledge of different archives, some of which were in Germany. When in 1965 he chose to replace his WWI-subject with that of the communist resistance during WWII, he began working on a book about ‘popular reactions to occupation’. In fact, the two chapters that he had already written for this book would later be integrated in *L’An 40* ¹⁰⁰. At the same time, Jules-Gérard Libois (the director of the *Centre de Recherches et d’Informations socio-politiques*, or CRISP) needed someone with knowledge of (mainly German) archives for the book he wanted to write about Belgian economic elites during WWII. Enter the duo of Libois and Gotovitch. *L’An 40* tackled the Belgian politics of neutrality after 1936 and the choices of Belgian elites in the first year of occu-

pation. More than just a book it was a public event, ultimately selling 25,000 copies (of which only ca. 15 % of sales were in Flanders; it was not translated into Dutch).

Gotovitch and Libois had to write this book without access to the essential ‘official’ archives of the political, administrative and economic actors. Those archives remained closed. They had to combine private archives, archives of political personalities, American and British Archives, the German *Tätigkeitsberichte*, interviews conducted by Libois and archives of the Communist Party ¹⁰¹. The book was a conscious rupture with the still dominant reluctance of most historians to bring WWII history to a ‘popular’ level. Scholarly and public reception was positive overall, mainly applauding the authors’ ‘objective’ and ‘purely scientific’ methods that allowed them to transcend particular political agendas. The book was also a critical deconstruction of Baudhuin’s patriotic defence of the ‘politics of the lesser evil’ by Belgian elites. This deconstruction was further developed by Gillingham’s PhD, published in 1973, on the Belgian business elite ¹⁰².

L’An 40 was not a CWWII-book but published by the more mature CRISP, created in 1958. The book is in fact indebted to its sociological and political science-approach. The CWWII was nevertheless able to reap the benefits from the book’s success. The number of visitors rose – with, for the first time, over 500 visitors in the academic year 1973-1974 – as did the donations of private archives ¹⁰³. Private archives – including personal *mémoires* – would become an important building block of the collections ¹⁰⁴.

97. JEAN VANWELKENHUYZEN, *Le Centre de Recherches*, p. 10, SOMA AA 849.

98. *Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis van de Tweede Wereldoorlog/Cahiers d’Histoire de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale*, Brussel/Bruxelles, 1970-1995. The digital content is accessible online: www.journalbelgianhistory.be.

99. JULES GÉRARD-LIBOIS and JOSÉ GOTOVITCH, *L’An 40 : la Belgique occupée*, Bruxelles, 1971 ; CHANTAL KESTELOOT, “Il ne s’agit pas ici d’un best-seller de qualité Incertaine”. Quelques échos suscités par la parution de *L’An 40*”, in *CHTP-BEC*, 15, 2005, p. 13-28.

100. E-mail by José Gotovitch to the author, 12 January 2019.

101. Idem.

102. JOHN GILLINGHAM, *Belgian Business in the Nazi New Order*, Gent, 1977.

103. DIRK MARTIN, *Het Studie (...)* p. 215.

104. KYLE MICHIELS, *Archivarissen en egodocumenten : wie de schoen past, trekt hem aan ? Het uitwerken van een gids van de egodocumenten in het CegeSoma*, Unpublished MAnAMA-thesis *Archivistiek : Erfgoedbeheer en Hedendaags Documentbeheer*, VUB, 2017.



CWWII-director Jean Van Welkenhuyzen (left) and researcher Albert De Jonghe during the public presentation of the Centre's scholarly Journal in 1972. De Jonghe's critical research about King Leopold III would lead to ongoing tensions between both. Van Welkenhuyzen's unwavering Leopoldism would ultimately instigate the end of his mandate as a director of CegeSoma in less-than-ideal circumstances. (Source : CegeSoma).



View at the reading room of the Study Centre for the History of the Second World War in 1979. Between 1971-1993, the Centre was housed at the Leuvenseplein/Place de Louvain in the centre of Brussels. (Source : CegeSoma).

The second 'essential' book, published in October 1972, was *Hitler en het politieke lot van België* (in Dutch) by Albert De Jonghe¹⁰⁵. This historian (who studied at KU Leuven but got a scholarship at Ghent University), who was working as a teacher, was a convicted Flemish-nationalist collaborator (he was convicted in 1946 to eighteen months in jail, later increased to three years)¹⁰⁶. His recruitment as a 'freelance' researcher (on a temporary research assignment contract) had come after fierce internal discussion. It is remarkable that some representatives of the resistance in the scientific committee, Luc Somerhausen most notably, pragmatically supported his recruitment (saying De Jonghe would simply be evaluated on the merit of his work)¹⁰⁷. Tasked to work on the German *Belgienpolitik*, De Jonghe used his personal drive to write an essential book about the German *Militärverwaltung* in Belgium (and the north of France), intended as the first in a two-volume series¹⁰⁸. The book was innovative in its confident treatment of the subject matter and use of new sources, and controversial because of its treatment of King Leopold III. The successive volume would be blocked by director Van Welkenhuyzen (a staunch Leopoldist) and the scientific committee. This created ongoing tensions, although De Jonghe would continue to work for the centre for the rest of his career¹⁰⁹.

Both (very different) books are often considered as the launch of WWII-studies in Belgium as a scholarly field. They can also be considered as the start of the tradition of 'public history' books: works that – unlike the aforementioned works by Baudhuin or Gilissen – consciously aimed to provoke a

broader public dialogue. That was not a won battle, however, as in a controversial decision both of these books missed the *Prix Pierlot* in 1973, clearly because the jury was not ready for these types of 'contemporary history' books¹¹⁰. Indeed, Gotovitch and Dejonghe were initially frowned upon by the closed, 'serious' historical professional group still very suspicious of popularizing (recent) history¹¹¹.

Both books might also be considered to represent the unique 'model' created by the new Belgian centre. That a former convicted Flemish nationalist collaborator and a French-speaking communist of Jewish ancestry would produce these works under the umbrella of the same state sponsored institute should – by most standards of logic – never have worked. Yet somehow it did, a situation one would find hard to reproduce in another country. What helps explain this is a lack of direct state intervention, a divided patriotic community and the pragmatic 'common sense' of key individuals, including the centre's director. Despite all tensions, the rightwing and pro-Leopold director Van Welkenhuyzen did 'protect' Gotovitch and De Jonghe against, for example, former resistance member Hubert Halin who was fiercely opposed to the presence of De Jonghe and distrustful of the work of Gotovitch¹¹².

Success came at a price – notably tension with the centre's own scientific committee that wanted researchers to focus on basic working-instruments (source publications for example) rather than their own individual research¹¹³. The latter prior-

105. PIETER JAN VERSTRAETE, "Albert De Jonghe", in *Nationaal Biografisch Woordenboek*, XVIII, Brussel, p. 494-499 en Idem, *Albert De Jonghe*, Brugge, 1998, p. 9-12.

106. Like the large majority of convicted collaborators, he received a full restitution of rights (1954).

107. Luc Somerhausen was a former member of the (Belgian Resistance Intelligence Services) and a key-member of the Contact Committee of the Patriotic Associations.

108. De Jonghe had was never part of the permanent staff; his contract had to be renewed every year. I. VAN DORSSELAER, "Een historicus voor historici", in *De Standaard*, 16 April 1998.

109. DIRK MARTIN, *Het Studie (...)*, p. 217.

110. CHANTAL KESTELOOT, *Il ne s'agit pas (...)*, p. 19-21.

111. E-mail by José Gotovitch to the author, 12 January 2019.

112. Halin came from the fiercely anti-Communist *Union Internationale de la Résistance*. D. MARTIN, *Het Studie (...)*, p. 214.

113. Idem, p. 216-219.

ity however was maintained, leading to further broader-public publications¹¹⁴.

Noteworthy also, was the involvement of foreign (English-language) scholars. Edgar Knoebel published about the SS in Belgium (1965), the former American officer George K. Tanham, who had participated to the liberation of Belgium, published on the resistance (1971), and John Gillingham published about the occupation industry (1974)¹¹⁵.

The first Belgian MA-thesis on WWII was written in 1971, at the ULB¹¹⁶. The first two doctorates about WWII produced in Belgian universities were by Mark Van den Wijngaert about the policy of the secretaries-general and by Els De Bens (in the department of Press and Communication Sciences, faculty of Legal Studies) about the Belgian daily press under occupation, published in 1972 and 1973 respectively¹¹⁷. Just as Gotovitch, Van den Wijngaert and De Bens were both born in 1940 and were therefore part of the generation of historians without any conscious memories about WWII.

Van den Wijngaert's study about the policy of the secretaries-general was partly based on the archives of the meetings and correspondence of

these civil servants. It remained close to these sources and was rather descriptive, but it tackled most controversial themes head-on. For De Bens, most essential archives remained difficult to access. De Bens inventoried the occupation-press herself to make her research possible. Gilissen, as head of the Military Prosecutor's Office, refused her access to essential archives. When, however, De Bens bought microfilmed archives (the German *Tätigkeitsberichte*) from the American National Archives and confronted Gilissen with this, the latter gave in. De Bens became the first researcher who could do systematic research in the legendary caves of the *Palais de Justice*. Apart from foreign archives and interviews, she was the first to use some of the larger dossiers created by G. Jans of the State Security for the military inquest procedures (notably his dossiers on the main collaboration parties)¹¹⁸. The commercial edition of her PhD generated a lot of attention¹¹⁹.

Meanwhile for the CWWII, reality kicked in. In the context of financial problems, uncertainty about its longer-term statute and the slow disintegration of the unitary Belgian state, personal tensions and existential discussions about the institute's future were endemic¹²⁰. To top it all off, 1989 saw the forced dismissal of director Van Welkenhuyzen.

114. WIM MEYERS (ed.), *Hoe België Wereldoorlog II overleefde!*, Brussel, 1975; *La Belgique occupée. Résistance et répression. 1. Introduction et documents. - 2. Illustrations*, Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale et de la Culture Française, Bruxelles, 1978; 8 Mai 1945, Ministerie van Nationale Opvoeding, Brussel, 1985; PAUL MORREN (ed.), *De Tweede Wereldoorlog. Een keerpunt in de geschiedenis*, Brussel, 1985.

115. EDGAR ERWIN KNOEBEL, *Racial illusion and military necessity: a study of SS political and manpower objectives in occupied Belgium*, Denver, 1965; GEORGE K. TANHAM, *Contribution à l'histoire de la résistance belge, 1940-1944*, Bruxelles, 1971; JOHN GILLINGHAM, "The Baron de Launoit: a Case Study in the "Politics of Production" of Belgian Industry during Nazi Occupation", in *BTNG/RBHC/IBH*, 1974, nr. 1/2, p. 1-59.

116. ISRAËL SHIRMAN, *La politique allemande à l'égard des Juifs de Belgique, 1940-1944*, Unpublished MA-Thesis, ULB, 1971.

117. MARK VAN DEN WIJNGAERT, *Het bestuur van de Secretarissen-Generaal in België tijdens de Duitse bezetting, 1940-1944*, Leuven, 1972; ELS DE BENS, *De Belgische dagbladpers onder Duitse censuur (1940-1944)*, Antwerpen, 1973.

118. For a more detailed analysis, see: ROEL VANDE WINKEL, "Wetenschappelijk onderzoek naar de dagbladpers in bezet België (1940-1944): evolutie van een onderzoeksdomein (1966-2005)", in FRIEDA SAEYS, HANS VERSTRAETEN (red.), *De media in maatschappelijk perspectief*, Gent, 2005, p. 3-29.

119. It is also interesting to note that De Bens' supervisor was Theo Luykx, a professor at the faculty of Law at Ghent University who, before the war, was a student leader of the collaborating *Vlaams Nationaal Verbond* and who was, after the war, temporarily suspended at Ghent University for activities in the collaborating media – something his PhD student discovered to her own surprise during her press-research. Luykx was also a member of the Scientific Committee of the CWWII. See: ROEL VANDE WINKEL, *Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (...)*, p. 10; HENNING TRÜPER, *Topography of a Method. François Louis Ganshof and the Writing of History*, Tübingen, 2014, p. 253–267.

120. For an overview of the attempts at reform of the centre in the 1980s, see: DIRK MARTIN, *Het Studie (...)*, p. 216-218.

As director, he had already shown his knack for headstrong individuality when he travelled to Spain to interview convicted collaborator Léon Degrelle without any knowledge of the scientific committee. After he fraudulently obtained documents related to the Royal Affair and then tried to withdraw these documents from the normal circuit, the scientific committee relieved him of his role as director and replaced him with José Gotovitch¹²¹. It was a rather miserable end to a difficult decade.

A short overview of WWII publications

Wim Meyers kept the bibliography of WWII-publications between 1970 and 1996 (after which this was taken over until 2006 by Dirk Luyten)¹²². Within the umbrella theme of 'pre-war' history, 41 publications were about socio-economic history, 37 about national politics, 36 about antifascism, 36 about foreign policy and 36 about military policy. Under the theme of the 'invasion', 181 publications were about military aspects, 46 about the civilian population, 31 about king and government. The vast majority of publications about collaboration considered specific Flemish collaboration (although it is difficult to put a precise number on this due to the different categories used by Meyers). The umbrella theme of 'population' was highly diverse: 52 publications were about daily life, 51 about concentration camps, 15 about racial persecution. The theme of liberation was mostly divided per locality or city, or per specific battle (for example, the Battle of the Bulge). In the post-war theme, 54 publications were about the repression and 22 about the Royal Affair.

Large 'Umbrella' Themes	Number of publications
Population	295
Invasion (1940)	260
Liberation	259
Pre-war	251
Biographical publications	243
Resistance	228
Government and Allies	149
Post-War	122
Occupied Belgium	113
Collaboration	99
Inventories	59

Bibliography WWII 1970-1980 (Meyers)¹²³

Umbrella Themes	Number of publications
Occupied Belgium	1404
Pre-war	649
Liberation	402
Invasion	367
Post-War	293
Government & Allies	222
Inventories	178
Biographical	160

Bibliography WWII Meyers 1981-1993¹²⁴

III. The golden era of WWII historiography: 1980-1995

The 'Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden' wrote in 1982 that, about a subject as essential as collaboration, scholarly literature presented little more than "the listing of some obvious facts and

121. At that time Gotovitch had the longest track service and was the only researcher in the centre to hold a PhD.

DIRK MARTIN, *Het Studie en Documentatiecentrum (...)*, p. 219-220.

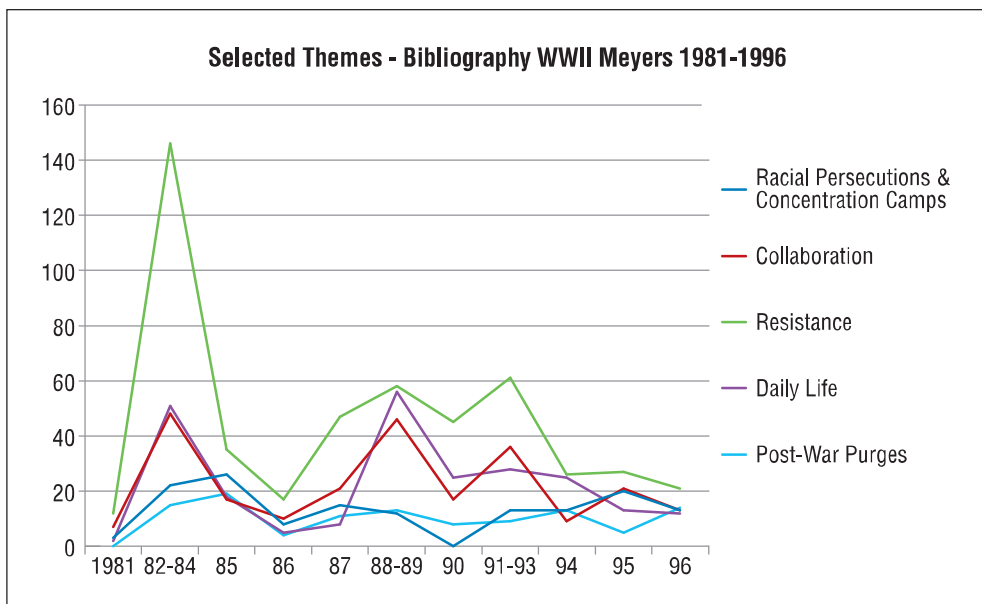
122. An important observation is that Meyers also included press clippings. A large number of the biographical publications are simply small press clippings, such as interviews and biographical notes.

123. WILLEM CLEMENS MEYERS, *België in de Tweede Wereldoorlog: bibliografie 1970-1980*, Brussel, 1983.

124. From 1970 to 1996, W. C. (Willem Clemens) Meyers maintained the annual bibliography of publications about Belgium in WWII. Consulted online: 12-28 November 2018.



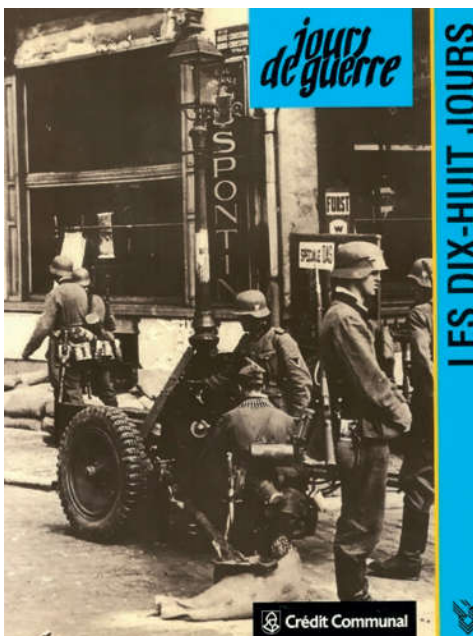
Flemish-nationalist history writing had a huge impact during the 1950s-1970s, constructing the narrative of the so-called 'anti-Flemish repression' by the Belgian state after the liberation. One example is the book by historian Karel Van Isacker (University of Antwerp) from 1971 ('Irma Laplasse. Her prison diary. Critique of her judicial penal dossier'). Laplasse was executed after the liberation for denouncing the names of resistance members to the Germans. The work of (among other) Van Isacker led to a revision of the original trial in 1995. Laplasse was found guilty again and posthumously given a lifelong sentence.



This graph mostly shows, throughout the entire period (1981-1996), production about the resistance was far higher than that about collaboration or post-war purges. 'Commemorations' appeared as a separate category for the first time in 1996 (following the commemorative year 1995).



Flemish journalist Maurice De Wilde (right) and Léon Degrelle in 1981. Rex-leader Degrelle was sentenced to death in Belgium after the war but lived out his life in exile in Spain as a poster boy for neo-Nazism in Europe. The interview with Degrelle aired in the documentary series 'De Nieuwe Orde' in 1982, leading to a huge uproar in Belgium.



The documentary-series *Jours de Guerre* (RTBF) and *De Nieuwe Orde* (BRT-N) not only reached a wide audience through television. The series integrated cutting edge historical research, launching the publication of two thematic book series that would remain standard reference works for decades.

some contradictory data”¹²⁵. Indeed, by 1980, large gaps remained in WWII historiography. This changed quickly after 1980. The tidal wave of WWII-series on national television kicked the door wide open for new research. Contemporary history matured in Belgian universities and WWII became an attractive choice for the growing number of (early career) academics, leading to a huge diversification of output. A convergence of institutional- and individual agency created a ‘golden era’ in WWII historiography, with a remarkable number works that would become standard references published between 1991 and 1995.

The seismic shift of television

The seismic shift in popular historical consciousness would come, not from scholarly books, but from two landmark TV-series produced independently, but more or less in parallel, by the Flemish and the French-speaking national television broadcasting companies (BRTN and RTBF): *De Nieuwe Orde* and *Jours de Guerre*.

The Flemish television series was a long time in the making (see above). Compared to the Netherlands – where Loe De Jong could impose his voice and could demand access to essential archives – the Belgian TV-research was conducted by a larger number of journalists and scholars who often lacked access to such archives. The most emblematic figurehead quickly became journalist Maurice De Wilde. He led the production cell from 1982 and was responsible for about half of the total production. He became quite literally the face of the entire series.

The impact of the series in Flanders was nothing short of a seismic shock. The series became one of the most successful in television history, provoking fierce debates, even provoking questions in parliament and a reaction from the Belgian monarchy. De Wilde consciously went for the taboos, favouring the topic of collaboration in disregard of many other topics, such as culture, daily life, social history and religion. The large sub-series were: The New Order (*‘De Nieuwe Orde’*, 1982), The Suspects (*‘De Verdachten’*, 1983), Political- and Youth Collaboration (*‘Politieke en Jeugdcollaboratie’*, 1985-1986), The Time of Reprisals (*‘De tijd der vergelding’*, 1988) and the Eastern-Front Fighters (*‘De Oostfronters’*, 1989). De Wilde clashed regularly with historians over his preference for sensationalist stories and refusal to prioritize the larger context¹²⁶. As early as 1984, the scientific committee refused to take full responsibility for the content and reduced itself to mere advisory status. The ‘production cell’ WWII of the BRT would ultimately air around 120 individual television programmes between 1973 and 1991¹²⁷. Notably, the Flemish series *De Nieuwe Orde* was also broadcast by the RTBF for a French-speaking audience.

Specifically for the French-speaking part of Belgium, journalist Jacques Cogniaux launched the landmark TV- (later also radio-)series *Jours de Guerre* (1989-2001)¹²⁸. These thematic emissions of the RTBF were launched in 1989 to accompany the 50th anniversary of WWII between 1990 and 1995. The series would ultimately have a runtime of seven years, leading to a radio-series, a series of publications (see further) and a popular collection of witness accounts and private documents and pictures.

125. “Opsomming van een aantal evidenties en paar tegenstrijdige gegevens”. Els Witte and Alain Meynen, “Het maatschappelijk-politieke leven in België 1945-1980”, in Dirk Peter Blok (a.o., eds.), *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden. Deel 15*, Haarlem, 1982 (quote: p. 214). See also: Herman Balthazar, “Het maatschappelijk-politieke leven in België 1914-1940” in *Idem*, part 14, 1981, p.148-199.

126. A favourite angle was the narrative of the little ‘ordinary man’ as the eternal victim of the big powers that be. Veerle Vanden Daelen, *Loe de Jong (...)*, p. 178.

127. *Idem*, p. 170.

128. Jean Stengers, “Mai 1940: un double regard. L’historien de télévision et l’historien traditionnel”, in *BTNC/RBHC/JBH*, 2004, 82-1-2, p. 151-174.

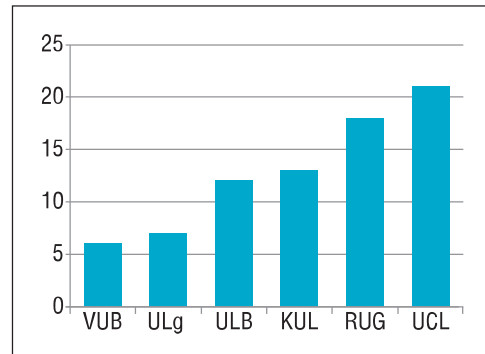
WWII was visualized, taboos were openly aired, and oral testimonies were made central. Both highly successful series popularized WWII in more senses than one: they brought the ‘big’ history of WWII into private households. A further consequence was an intense collaboration between journalists and academics, lasting for many years to the benefit of both parties¹²⁹. These series exponentially expanded the platform of academic Belgian WWII scholars. They confirmed Belgian historians in their role as authoritative expert-gatekeepers of history.

The universities confirm their dominant position

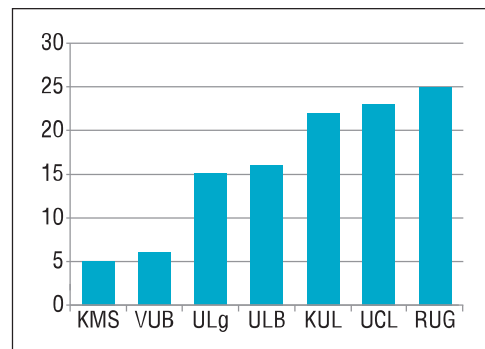
In the early 1980s, the focal point of WWII-research shifted to the universities. Contemporary history matured in university departments while the media landslide helped to turn WWII into an exciting new domain.

By the mid-1980s each university had one or more professors – often with a CWWII-connection – actively promoting WWII-related research. This included PhD research, but also Master’s programmes and Bachelor’s seminars¹³⁰. The two most important pioneers of MA-thesis research were Jacques Lory (UCL) and Herman Balthazar (Ghent). They were the earliest supervisors of systematic WWII research on a MA-level and oversaw

the most MA-research between 1975 and 1994. Slightly later in that period followed important supervisors such as Francis Balace (ULg), Lode Wils (KU Leuven), Jean Stengers (ULB) and later also José Gotovitch (ULB), Louis Vos (KU Leuven) and Bruno De Wever (Ghent).



MA-Research 1975-1994 per University¹³¹

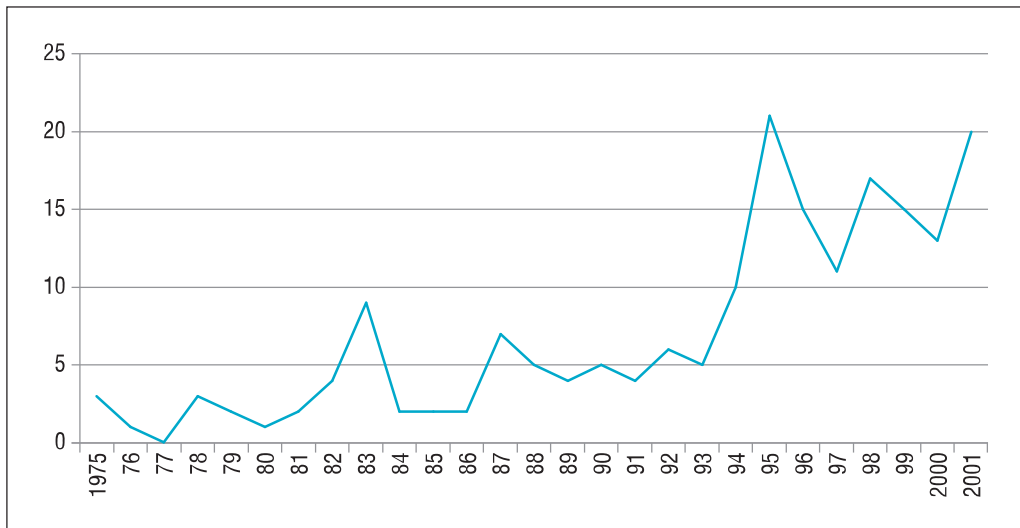


MA-Research 1995-2001 per University

129. Etienne Verhoeyen, a moral philosopher by training who, after a few years of voluntary research, was officially added to the BRT-team in 1977. Another important journalist was Herman Van de Vijver, who at one point led the research team on the resistance. Other historians (later working for the CWWII) were Rudi Van Doorslaer (later the director of CegeSoma), Lieven Saerens and Frank Seberechts. In a final phase, emissions were aired on the resistance, on culture during wartime, again on the German invasion and on the Belgian Congo, but also on the politics of the lesser evil (1990, Verhoeyen), on the postwar period (1990, Van Meerbeeck), on the government in exile (1990, Verhoeyen and Van Meerbeeck), on the post-war repression (1990-1991, De Wilde). Some radio programmes were aired as well. VERLE VANDEN DAELLEN, *Loe De Jong (...)*, p. 173.

130. By the end of the 1980s, Ghent University had four PhDs: on the labour union under occupation, on the city of Bruges under occupation, on Jewish migrants and on the collaborating Flemish National Union, by respectively Wouter Steenhaut, Luc Schepens, Rudi Van Doorslaer and Bruno De Wever. In Leuven, Griet Van Haver did PhD research on the interwar Catholic Party and Lieven Saerens worked on Antisemitism and Jewish Persecutions in the city of Antwerp. At ULB, Gotovitch and Maxime Steinberg were doing their PhD work on the communist resistance and the Jewish persecutions. Alain Dantoing finished his PhD in 1990 at UCL about the Belgian episcopate in 1939-1940. MAXIME STEINBERG, *L'étoile et le fusil*, Bruxelles, 1983-1986, 3 vol.; JOSÉ GOTOVITCH, "Le Parti Communiste de Belgique 1939-1940, stratégie nationale et pratique locale: la fédération bruxelloise", in *BTNG/RBHC/JBH*, 1989, nr. 3/4, p. 527-535.

131. LUC FRANÇOIS (ed.), *De vele gezichten (...)*.



MA-Research about WWII per year (1975-2001)

A first roundup of MA-research was made during a CWWII-conference on 11 May 1990¹³². At UCL the dominant focus was oral history and local (micro-) history about occupation and liberation in the provinces of Brabant, Namur and Hainaut. Jacques Lory (UCL) is unparalleled in the sheer quantity of MA-theses about WWII between 1975 and 2001. He also supervised oral history seminars (with the assistance of Fabrice Maerten) from 1985 to 1998 about daily life under occupation. This resulted in a collection of over 1200 interviews at CegeSoma (see the contribution of Fabrice Maerten in this volume)¹³³. At the University of Ghent, Herman Balthazar launched a series of MA-theses and a seminar on, amongst other topics, the (dis-)continuity of local governments from 1938-1947. In the early 1990s, another series of local resistance-studies was added to this. MA-research at other universities was slightly more fragmented. At the ULB, one focus clearly was the resistance (Gotovitch). At the Catholic University of Leuven, Lode Wils

supervised work on the impact of WWII on nationalism and regionalism and the disintegration of the Belgian state, whilst Emmanuel Gerard supervised work on the Catholic Labour Movement. At the Liège university, the most essential topics were collaboration, Rexism and post-war repression in the province of Liège, based on press-sources and under the supervision of, among others, Francis Balace. This was remarkable as the general trend in Francophone Belgium was still to steer away from the topic of collaboration¹³⁴. At the Catholic University in Brussels, Mark Van Den Wijngaert supervised seminars from 1982 onwards about public opinion under occupation, with a different annual theme, such as Leopold III, food supply, the occupier and collaboration. At the Royal Military Academy, the research-focus during the second half of the 1980s shifted away from the resistance and to more varied micro-studies of specific military units or (urban) battlefields. Some of this early MA-research was also published.

132. *De oorlog doorheen universitair onderzoek (...)*.

133. Archival collection AA 1641, *La vie quotidienne dans le Brabant wallon, le Hainaut et le Namurois (1940-1945) et l'occupation en Belgique en général (collection Jacques Lory): travaux de séminaires, 1984-1998*.

134. CHANTAL KESTELOOT, "La résistance: ciment d'une identité en Wallonie?", in GABRIELLE DRIGEARD and CHANTAL KESTELOOT (eds.), *La Résistance et les Européens du Nord/*, Bruxelles, 1994, p. 406-418 (reference p. 416).

After the state reform of 1993, Belgium devolved into a federalized (regionalized) state where the large bulk of research funding now unambiguously went to the universities. For the purposes of this article, the Flemish *Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek* (FWO, Research Foundation Flanders) provided us with a list of WWII-related research after 1945, including the refused applications¹³⁵. These results also apply until 1986 for the French-language *Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique* (FNRS)¹³⁶. Between 1947 and 2018, there were seventy-seven WWII-proposals for PhD-mandates submitted for funding to the FWO (in reality only fifty, excluding all re-submissions and prolongations). Of these, thirty-one projects were approved. In that same period there were twenty-five PhD-research projects submitted for funding (in reality only fifteen projects, excluding all re-submissions), eleven of which were approved. The first individual FWO-mandate approved for funding was in October 1947, on the topic of 'international monetary cooperation' before and during WWII. Interestingly, there are several rejections between 1974 and 1989, including a peculiar project about whether cooperation between German and allied resistance could have 'made a difference' (rejected in 1974) and a project on labour and employment in Belgium during WWII (rejected in 1988). The first Holocaust-related research in Flanders was submitted very late: in October 1991, from a perspective of ethics and moral-philosophy. From a total of sixty-five single research projects (fifteen + fifty), twenty-one were about collaboration or post-war repression (or both), eighteen about the Holocaust and only five about the resistance.

In very general terms, despite the varied nature, one might observe a shift away from the national elites towards interest in daily life, social history, micro-history and history from below, as well as an enlargement of the period to include the 1930s and 1950s.

And the Centre for WWII studies (1989-1997)?

Meanwhile, the CWWII remained surrounded by a 'perfume of crisis'. Fifty years after the liberation one could ask whether Belgium still needed a separate centre for WWII studies. The new director José Gotovitch trod carefully to find the right balance between ambition and prudent realism. The centre confirmed its legitimacy through a series of three anniversary conferences on, respectively, 22-26 October 1990 (about the first half of the occupation on the 50th anniversary of the German invasion), 1992 (about forced labour) and in October 1995 (about the impact of WWII in Belgium, also related to "cultures and mentalities"). Each of these conferences was explicitly meant to accentuate the CWWII's identity and continued relevance¹³⁷. Not losing WWII as a focus was essential as this theme was considered quintessentially national. These three conferences confirmed this: the thematic scope was enlarged, but WWII remained the core. During the 11 May 1990 conference, Jean Stengers saw several future roles of the centre in relation to the universities: bringing some central 'planification' in WWII-research, to create a methodological framework for oral history research, and to guide researchers to

135. The online database only contains the approved projects: <http://www.geschiedenisfwo.be/search>. With an e-mail from 11 November 2018, the FWO provided the author with a list of projects both approved and refused for funding between 1945-2018. The title-keywords asked by the author to the FWO were (in Dutch): *Wereldoorlog, Bezetting, Repressie, Collaboratie, Collaborateur, Verzet, Holocaust, Shoah, Joden*, with a distinction between individual PhD-mandates and PhD-research projects.

136. Unfortunately, despite numerous attempts, the *Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique* (FNRS) refused to provide us with the list of WWII-related research before 2010 (the starting point of their online database).

137. PHILIP VAN DEN HEUVEL, *Geschiedenis (...)*, p. 113.



André Flammée (left) and Frans Selleslagh (right) in the printing office at the Leuvenseplein where Ceges-Soma was situated from 1971-1993. Selleslagh was one of the original researchers of 1969 and mostly developed a career in the Documentation Sector, through the creation of large survey-documentation on the topic of Catholic Life under occupation, among other projects, and as 'founding father' of the sector of audio-visual archives in the Centre. Flammée started working in the Centre in 1973 and coordinated the printing office.



José Gotovitch (left) and Jean Stengers during the Belgique-1940 Conference in 1990. Stengers, one of the ULB's most influential post-war historians, became a member of the scientific committee of CegesSoma in 1980. Stengers thought that Centre would have a more durable future if it became a broader 'Centre for Contemporary Belgian History', something that would be ultimately blocked, predominantly by the Flemish universities. The Centre maintained its focus on conflicts and wars. Stengers became the intellectual mentor of Gotovitch, serving as the supervisor of his doctorate thesis in 1988. (Source : CegesSoma).

new archival sources¹³⁸. The most essential role however was the CWWII's relevance as a national platform of dialogue between the different academic language communities in the new federal state of Belgium, a vision supported by the departments of contemporary history. This way, the centre played an important role in the reinforcement of a sub-group of Belgian scholars that identified themselves as 'WWII-historians'.

The centre's historical journal was transformed in 1995 under the new title "Contributions to Contemporary History"¹³⁹. It was a stepping stone to the reform of the centre itself in 1997, after many years of discussion¹⁴⁰. The centre was now called the 'Study and Documentation Centre for War and Contemporary Society' (*Ceges* and *Soma* in respectively the French and Dutch acronym). The reform compromised by identifying a choice located in the middle-ground. The mission and scope were explicitly enlarged ('war and contemporary society') but it was also implicitly clear that WWII would remain the dominant focus. WWII remained the almost exclusive focus of the centre's archival policy, as well as the core of its research and dissemination activities¹⁴¹. More essential changes were to be found on the formal level. The new statutes of the scientific committee confirmed the universities' hold on the centre's strategic and operational policy. The representation of the patriotic community was reduced to almost non-existent¹⁴². In 2000, the representatives of the patriotic communities would disappear completely from the scientific committee.

The new centre positioned itself in a supportive role to the universities' research agendas. This was also reflected in the recruitment of the scientific staff. Its composition reflected the ideological and linguistic equilibrium among the different universities. This turned the centre into a unique micro-cosmos of the Belgian academic world. The centre did maintain the freedom to carve out its own programme and, in the years following 1997, scholarly activities were organized on the Marshallplan, the Belgian government in London, WWI in relation to WWII, Pacifism during the Interwar Years, and youth movements. Research projects were funded on the Belgian administration under occupation, resistance in Flanders, the police during both World Wars and refugee- and migrant policies¹⁴³.

Historiographical trends (1989-1995)

During this period, research output increased and diversified¹⁴⁴. The publications of these three conferences were important volumes that confirmed that the CWWII was the only actor that could represent the national diversity of WWII studies¹⁴⁵. The first was published in 1993 with sections on Belgium in the international context, crisis and economy, and ideology and resistance, printed alongside the results of a roundtable with, among others, Francis Balace and Jean Stengers with several renowned foreign historians. With the last publication and conference, WWII studies were

138. JEAN STENGERS, *Brèves considerations (...)*.

139. *Bijdragen tot de Eigentijdse Geschiedenis (30/60)/Cahiers d'Histoire du Temps Présent (30/60)*, 1996-2011.

140. For a short overview: DIRK MARTIN, *Geschiedenis in het centrum. 35 jaar Studie- en Documentatiecentrum Oorlog en Hedendaagse Maatschappij*, Brussel, 2004, p. 14-15.

141. This focus remained despite some ventures into colonial history. Ministerial Decision 10 January 1997, *Moniteur Belge* 1 March 1997. Again, this contribution is not about the institutional history of the institute and we therefore do not tackle in detail the several institutional reforms between 1982-2002.

142. See: DIRK MARTIN, *Het Studie (...)*, p. 222.

143. DIRK MARTIN, *De Geschiedenis (...)*, p. 24.

144. See also the historiographical overview Dirk Luyten wrote in the framework of the INSFO-network (European Science Foundation). 'Belgium' (consulted online on 12 January 2019). We will not systematically tackle works spanning a larger period in which occupation history was also dealt with.

145. Respectively: *België, een maatschappij in crisis en oorlog, 1940/Belgique, une société en crise, un pays en guerre, 1940*, Brussel, 1993; *De verplichte tewerkstelling in Duitsland 1942-1945/Le travail obligatoire en Allemagne, 1942-1945*, Bruxelles, 1993; ALAIN COLIGNON, CHANTAL KESTELOOT and DIRK MARTIN (eds.), *Commémoration. Enjeux et débats*, Brussel, 1996.



General view on the venue of the conference on Forced Labour from 6-7 October 1992. Between 1990 and 1995 CegeSoma organized a series of prestigious conferences, including Belgique-1940 (1990), Forced Labour (1992) and Cultures et Mentalités (23-27 October 1995). These were grand and formal academic gatherings, meant to re-affirm the continued legitimacy of CegeSoma as a national academic centre (Source : CegeSoma).



Minister Louis Tobback (left) of the Interior on 6 October 1992, declaring the formal opening of the CegeSoma conference about Forced Labour. (Source : CegeSoma)



Etienne Verhoeyen (left) and a young and upcoming Pieter Lagrou (ULB) during the conference on Forced Labour in 1992. By this time Verhoeyen – who had worked his way up as a humble volunteer for the historical production unit of the BRT – was established as an essential WWII-historian. The presentation of the young Lagrou during this particular conference about ‘myths and taboos’, prompted protest from the National Union of Deportees. They thought Lagrou’s intervention ignored the human aspect and they were also not pleased with Lagrou’s assessment of the Union as closely connected to the organized Catholic movement. Lagrou’s PhD was published by Cambridge University Press in 2000 (Source : CegeSoma).



A slightly intimidating panel of the Forced Labour conference organised by CegeSoma between 6-7 October 1992. From left to right : Mark Van den Wijngaert (Katholieke Universiteit Brussel), Gilbert De Ridder and Auguste Roeseler (both leaders of the National Union of Deportees and Forced Labourers), Fernand Erauw (vice-president of the scientific committee of the CWWII), Francis Balace (ULg), Philippe Destatte (directeur Institut Jules Destrée), and José Gotovitch. (Source : CegeSoma).



The young and upcoming historian Bart De Wever during one of his first major scholarly appearances, at the CegeSoma conference Cultures et Mentalités in 1995. If the laughter of his PhD-supervisor Louis Vos (KU Leuven and member of the CegeSoma Scientific Committee) in the foreground is any indication, De Wever at that time already possessed his trademark wit. De Wever would never finish his PhD about Flemish Nationalism after 1945 but chose to embark on an extraordinarily successful political career. He became the driving force and president of the biggest political party in Belgium (N-VA, New Flemish Alliance) and – during the publication of this article – Mayor of the city of Antwerp. (Source: CegeSoma).



Press Conference in 1991 reporting the transfer of the Belgian archives pertaining to military collaboration found in the so-called 'Moscow Archives' (or 'Osoby-archives') to the Study Centre for the History of the Second World War (CWWII). From left to right: José Gotovitch, Dirk Martin, (both CWWII) Wouter Steenhaut and Michel Vermote (both of the Amsab-Institute). These archives – looted by the Germans and afterwards taken by the Soviet forces – were identified in Russia in 1990 in a joint effort of the CWWII and Amsab (Source: CegeSoma).

broadened to cultural history and the history of mentalities, foreshadowing the dominance of the cultural turn and of memory studies. These massive publications were not monographs but fairly fragmented edited volumes.

Regarding quantity of output, the resistance remained one of the dominant themes. It was studied based on its type (armed resistance, clandestine press, intelligence services), based on ideology and on a socio-economic group, or from micro-angles (such as biographies and local cases). The connection between the former right-wing resistance and the Royal Military Academy since the 1950s led, in 1986, to a book by Henri Bernard about the Secret Army in a joint effort with a committee of former resisters and military scholars. The book was an 'organisational history' without a critical perspective but it nevertheless remains a pioneering work. It was quickly followed by a string of spinoffs, mostly supervised by Jean-Léon Charles¹⁴⁶. They included a book in 1987 by colonel Van Poucke (at that time national president of the Secret Army) and a six-volume series – both in Dutch and French – by colonel Victor Marquet (vice-president of the Secret Army) between 1991 and 1995¹⁴⁷. Another book in the same vein was Strubbe's *Geheime oorlog* about the resistance intelligence services¹⁴⁸. In part, this scholarly effort was also meant to 'safeguard' the memory of the resistance.

But here as well, the universities confirmed their dominance. The most essential work in this regard was the PhD research by Fabrice Maerten (UCL) and the research by José Gotovitch on the *Front de l'Indépendance* (see further). Maerten provided an in-depth political, organisational and ideological study of the resistance in the industrialized province of Hainaut and would later work on the resistance and on Catholic elites, gender and youth¹⁴⁹.

Collaboration (and post-war purges) remained an important topic especially in Flanders. An important sub-topic was the Flemish Eastern-Front volunteers¹⁵⁰. Less was published on the topic of collaboration in French-speaking Belgium and Francis Balace remained the dominant voice here in academia¹⁵¹. Important to mention is the work of Eddy De Bruyne, who developed a remarkable research activity on the topics of collaboration, Rex and the Walloon Legion¹⁵².

A notable topic that was rarely included in bibliographies as a separate theme was the history of the Catholic church and movement¹⁵³. One of the few available examples is Alain Dantoing's book about the political activity of archbishop Van Roey and the book about the Catholic labour movement¹⁵⁴. In the ongoing bibliographies (Meyers, later Luyten), the heterogeneous topic of daily life is also difficult to clearly distinguish from other categories such as socio-economic history, food-

146. The revenues of the book went to the 'social service' of the Secret Army organisation, to support its members and their families.

147. GUY VAN POUCKE, *Niet langer geheim : 69 groepen - 2.500 man 1940-1944*, Gent, 1987; VICTOR MARQUET *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis van het Geheim Leger, 1940-1944*, Brussel, 1991-1995, 6 vol.

148. FERNAND STRUBBE, *Geheime oorlog 40/45 : de inlichtings- en actiediensten in België*, Tielt, 1992.

149. FABRICE MAERTEN, *Du murmure au grondement. La résistance politique et idéologique dans la province du Hainaut pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale (mai 1940 – septembre 1944)*, Mons, 1999.

150. FRANK SEBERECHTS, *Tussen Schelde en Wolchow: Vlaanderen en het Oostfront*, Antwerpen, 2002.

151. FRANCIS BALACE, "Rex 40-41 : l'engrenage de la trahison", in *Jours noirs*, Bruxelles, 1992, p. 57-110.

152. EDDY DE BRUYNE, *Les Wallons meurent à l'Est. La Légion Wallonie et Léon Degrelle sur le Front russe. 1941-1945*, Bruxelles, 1991.

153. Important for this theme – and also for research in the late 1990s and after 2000 – was the survey 'Kerk/Eglise' conducted by the CWIIL in the 1970s and 1980s, that collected data about mostly the local clergy under occupation.

154. ALAIN DANTOING, *La collaboration du Cardinal : l'Eglise de Belgique dans la guerre 40*, Bruxelles, 1991; EMMANUEL GERARD (ed.), *De Christelijke Arbeidersbeweging in België 1891-1991*, Leuven, 1991, 2 vol.

Het Geheim Leger

U.V.G.L.



1940-1944

Algemene leiding

Henri BERNARD

UITGAVE

J. VERBEKE

The Royal Military Academy supervised a series of books about the history of the (right-wing) resistance in the 1980s. These works did not have a big impact on collective historical consciousness about the importance of the resistance in Belgium during WWII.

supply or local studies¹⁵⁵. The concept of 'daily life' as such, was hardly conceptualized in fundamental work. Arguably, the standard works to this day remain older studies: the De Launay and Offergeld publication from 1982 and a 1985 publication which resulted from an exhibition on the topic in 1984-1985¹⁵⁶. Noteworthy on the topic of economic history is the landmark article by Verhoeven in 1986, nuancing Gillingham's critical stance on the so-called Galopin Committee¹⁵⁷. It was followed by Van den Wijngaert's book in 1990 about the Galopin 'Doctrine' (based on the recently opened archives of the holding *Société Générale* of which Galopin was head during the occupation), and the PhD of Patrick Nefors about the *Emissiebank*, that regulated the financing of Belgian-German trade, and more generally German economic exploitation under occupation¹⁵⁸. Several sectoral case studies were published as well. Brussels historian Peter Scholliers almost single-handedly pioneered the social history of food supply and material living conditions in the 1980s¹⁵⁹. Essential as well, was Anne

Henau's research based on the publications of the National Agriculture and Food Corporation and sources related to the secretaries-general¹⁶⁰.

The police and judiciary were researched by Rudi Van Doorslaer¹⁶¹. Local government received pioneering publications of Wim Meyers, Alain Colignon, Dirk Martin (Antwerp) and the MA-research done at Ghent University¹⁶². Research about education focussed, among other topics, on the universities and textbook-revisions¹⁶³. Press-studies (especially in MA-research) retained its popularity as well¹⁶⁴.

Overall, research about culture remained rare. Studies on the German occupiers were also few and far between and general occupation syntheses remained a rarity as well¹⁶⁵. The only works that could count as the latter were the English book by Werner Warmbrunn and (especially) the later general overviews of the occupation published in the thematic book series accompanying the TV-series of the 1980s-1990s, respectively the 14-volume

155. For a detailed historiographical overview of the topic of food supply: LUIS ANGEL BERNARDO Y GARCIA, *Le Ventre des Belges (...)*, Unpublished Doctorate Thesis, p. 45-66.

156. JACQUES DE LAUNAY and JACQUES OFFERGELD, *La vie quotidienne des Belges sous l'occupation, 1940-1945*, Bruxelles, 1982; 1940-1945: *het dagelijkse leven in België: tentoonstelling*, Brussel, ASLK-Galerij, Brussel, 1984.

157. ETIENNE VERHOEVEN, "Les grands industriels belges entre collaboration et résistance: le moindre mal" in, *CHSGM/BGTWO*, 1986; nr. 10, p. 57-114.

158. MARK VAN DEN WIJNGAERT, *Nood breekt wet. Economische collaboratie of accommodatie. Het beleid van Alexandre Galopin, gouverneur van de Société Générale tijdens de Duitse bezetting (1940-1944)*, Tielt, 1990; PATRICK NEFORS, *Industriële "collaboratie" in België. De Galopindoctrine, de Emissiebank en de Belgische industrie*, Leuven, 2000.

159. PETER SCHOLLIERS, *L'appauvrissement organisé: les prix, les salaires et le pouvoir d'achat sous l'occupation, dans 1940-1945: la vie quotidienne en Belgique*, Bruxelles, 1984, p. 109-119.

160. MARK VAN DEN WIJNGAERT and ANNE HENAU, *België op de bon: rantsoenering en voedselvoorziening onder Duitse bezetting*, Leuven, 1986.

161. RUDI VAN DOORSLAER, "La police belge et le maintien de l'ordre en Belgique occupée" in ETIENNE DEJONGHE (ed.), *L'occupation en France et en Belgique 1940-1944. Revue du Nord 1987-1988*, 2 vol. I, p. 73-101.

162. WILLEM MEYERS, "Les autorités communales belges au début de l'occupation (1940-1941)", in ETIENNE DEJONGHE (ed.), *L'occupation (...)*, p. 195-218; ALAIN COLIGNON, "Le nouvel ordre communal" in FRANCIS BALACE (ed.), *Jours de guerre/jours mêlés*, Bruxelles, 1997, p. 35-92; DIRK MARTIN, "Un bourgmestre entre accommodation et refus", in *Jours de guerre/jours de chagrin II*, Bruxelles, 1992, p. 91-101; PETRA GUNST (ed.), "Burgemeesters en raadsleden 1938-1947. Verandering en continuïteit van het politiek personeel", in *Les élections communales et leur impact sur la politique belge (1890-1970)*, Bruxelles, 1994, p. 399-427.

163. DIRK MARTIN, "Les universités belges pendant la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale", in ETIENNE DEJONGHE (ed.), *L'occupation (...)*, p. 315-336; MICHEL B. FINCOEUR, "De la révision des manuels scolaires comme révélateur des ambiguïtés d'un vichysme belge", in *Archives et Bibliothèques de Belgique*, 1999, LXX, p. 103-150.

164. JEAN-LÉO, *La Collaboration au quotidien. Paul Colin et Le Nouveau Journal, 1940-1944*, Bruxelles, 2002; JEAN-MARIE DELAUNOIS, *Dans la mêlée du XX^e siècle. Robert Poulet, le corps étranger*, Erpe, 2003.

165. WILFRIED WAGNER, *Belgien in der deutschen Politik während des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, Boppard, 1974; HANS UMBREIT, "Les pouvoirs allemands en France et en Belgique", in ETIENNE DEJONGHE (ed.), *L'occupation (...)*, p. 5-40; ETIENNE VERHOEVEN, "Jours de terreur, jours de doute", in *Jours de guerre/jours de doute*, Bruxelles, 1994, p. 113-125.

series *Jours de Guerre* and the eight-volume series *België in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*¹⁶⁶. The book *België bezet* by Verhoeyen – partly also a spinoff of these series – would, for a long time, be the most used synthesis reference work (see further).

The most important trend during this period, might be the rise of the study of the Holocaust or Shoah. Public awareness in Belgium about the Holocaust was almost non-existent until the 1970s and scholarly research was limited to a few fragmentary studies, sometimes considered biased¹⁶⁷. In 1978-1979, the BRT-RTBF broadcasted the American docudrama *Holocaust* and, in 1980, *The Stichting Auschwitz/Fondation Auschwitz* was created¹⁶⁸. One man, however, put the subject on the academic map: Maxime Steinberg, a historian from the ULB who was himself the son of persecuted Jewish parents (his mother was deported), started doing research in 1975 on the Jewish (communist) resistance but quickly focussed on the Jewish persecution in general. Steinberg and Gotovitch were *compagnons de route* and initially worked on the communist resistance together, after which Gotovitch left the topic of Jewish persecutions open to Steinberg. An important stepping stone was Steinberg's role as an expert for the civil parties in the German trial against the former head of the Jewish Affairs in occupied Belgium Kurt Asche (convicted to seven years in 1981). This led to his first landmark publication¹⁶⁹. Between 1983 and 1987, Steinberg published his PhD research (under supervision of Jean Stengers, ULB, 1987) in three volumes¹⁷⁰. It was the first empirically profound, confident

study with a well-argued critical stance towards the role of public Belgian authorities. The resonance of Steinberg's work served as a wake-up call for the CWWII who, in May 1989, co-organized the first big symposium on the Holocaust in Belgium (at the Bar Ilan University in Tel Aviv). Steinberg laid the groundwork for historical Holocaust-research in Belgium. As such, the work by Lieven Saerens about the city of Antwerp and the book *Gewillig België/Belgique Docile* can be considered as continuation of his legacy.

Other important works were published by Jean-Philippe Schreiber (ULB), who co-edited with Rudi Van Doorslaer the volume of the *Association of Belgian Jews under occupation* (published in Dutch and French) and, among others, also a biographical dictionary about the Jews in Belgium¹⁷¹.

Golden era works (1990-1995)

This section does not aim to give a 'most important' list but to defend the point that, over the course of a few years, many of the most essential topics (collaboration, repression, the resistance, the Royal Affair, forced labour) received their standard reference works.

A team from the legal faculty at KU Leuven (Luc Huyse, Steven Dhondt, Paul Depuydt, Kris Hoflack and Ingrid Vanhoren) did massive research for what in 1991 became the book *Onverwerkt Verleden*¹⁷². It was the first attempt at

166. *Jours de Guerre*, Bruxelles, 1990-2001, 14 vol; The series *België in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* was published between 1982 and 1988 and had nine thematic volumes (part seven in the series was never published). Each volume covering one theme; volume seven of the intended nine never appeared.

167. LIEVEN SAERENS, "Van vergeten naar gegeerd. Dossin en de Joodse herinnering", in *JBH*, 2012, nr. 2-3, p. 138-169.

168. Created by the Belgian network of former political prisoners of the camps Auschwitz-Birkenau, later a Centre for Study and Documentation, 'asbl Auschwitz in Remembrance'.

169. MAXIME STEINBERG, *Dossier Brussel-Auschwitz : de SS-politie en de uitroeiing van de joden ; gevolgd door gerechtelijke documenten van de rechtszaak Ehlers, Canaris en Asche bij het Assisenhof te Kiel*, Brussel, 1981.

170. MAXIME STEINBERG, *L'étoile et le fusil (...)*.

171. JEAN-PHILIPPE SCHREIBER (ed.), *Dictionnaire biographique des Juifs de Belgique. Figures du judaïsme belge, XIX^e-XX^e siècles*, Bruxelles, 2002; RUDI VAN DOORSLAER and JEAN-PHILIPPE SCHREIBER (eds.), *De curatoren van het getto : de vereniging van de joden in België tijdens de nazi-bezetting*, Tielt, 2004.

172. DIRK LUYTEN and JOGGIE MEHUIZEN, "Luc Huyse: interview met een multi-disciplinair grensbewoner", in *Pro Memorie. Bijdragen tot de rechtsgeschiedenis der Nederlanden*, VI (2004) 1-2, p. 288.

a broad scholarly analysis of the post-war purges in Belgium to confront the work by Gilissen in the 1950s. The researchers took the unique approach of taking large samples of the excerpts of post-war convictions and civic purge (*épuration*) decisions published in the official Belgian *Staatsblad/Moniteur* (a sample of 5061 decisions and convictions; 6.5 % of the counted total). Focussing on convicted collaborators, the book ultimately deconstructed the enduring myth of a conscious political 'anti-Flemish repression'. It did indicate certain mistakes or anomalies in post-war procedures and convictions, for example, regional inequalities in the convictions or the high severity of punishments notably in the first year after liberation. The book was a scholarly and political bombshell. The huge impact of this book was even greater because of its explicit political message. The authors defended certain political initiatives to 'close the past'¹⁷³. The book was also translated into French and was published in 1993 by CRISP¹⁷⁴. The French version had a preface: a 'disclaimer', warning French-speaking audiences that the authors took a clear position in the political 'amnesty debate'.

In 1992, Gotovitch published *Du rouge au tricolore* about the attitudes, choices and strategies of the communist party under occupation, notably their dominant role in the pluralist resistance organisation the Independence Front¹⁷⁵. The book was the result of a lengthy research process. Gotovitch had been doing years of research before he obtained a FNRS scholarship to finally undertake a PhD at the ULB in 1988. Deeply empirical, the book was based on archives of the Brussels communist party and nearly 300 interviews and archives of the Communist International in Moscow. It was not only a seminal work on the resist-

ance under occupation, but also on the political history of the communist party in Belgium during a watershed era and a social history of the labour movement. Perhaps it did not have a huge public resonance at the time, but it would quickly turn out to be one of those enduring reference works (re-published in 2018).

In 1993, Etienne Verhoeyen published *België bezet* (the French translation was published a year later). For decades, this book would remain one of the few occupation syntheses about Belgium and, as such, remained a standard work¹⁷⁶. The book was the result of a mission appointed to Verhoeyen by the BRTN given in 1991. The aim was to write 'the book of the TV-series'¹⁷⁷. Verhoeyen was the right man for the job. He had been one of the single most consistent researchers during the entire run of the series and had gathered expertise about a wide range of topics. Unfortunately, the BRTN itself seemed to have lost interest in the book after one year which meant Verhoeyen could not fulfil his entire ambition. Granted, the book makes specific selections (mainly the politics of the lesser evil by Belgian elites, German exploitation and repression and the resistance), but it remains to this day one of the few monographs that tried to capture the entire occupation. As such, it was a starting point for a generation of researchers.

The topic of collaboration received its two essential landmark studies one year later: *Collaboration in Belgium* by Martin Conway (Oxford) and *Greep naar de Macht* by Bruno De Wever (Ghent).

De Wever had already in 1984 published his MA-thesis on Flemish Eastern-Front volunteers, basing it partly on oral histories. He could access these networks because he descended

173. LUC HUYSE, "Composer le passé?", in *Le Soir*, 8.2.1994.

174. LUC HUYSE and STEVEN DHONDT, *La répression des collaborations 1942-1952. Un passé toujours présent*, Brussel, 1993.

175. JOSÉ GOTOVITCH, *Du rouge au tricolore : les communistes belges de 1939 à 1944, un aspect de l'histoire de la Résistance en Belgique*, Bruxelles, 1992.

176. ETIENNE VERHOEYEN, *België bezet – 1940-1944. Een synthese*, Brussel, 1993; in French: *La Belgique occupée. De l'An 40 à la Libération*, Bruxelles, 1994. Incidentally, that same year the German-American historian WERNER WARMBRUNN also published his *The German occupation of Belgium, 1940-1944*, New York, 1993.

177. E-mail from Etienne Verhoeyen to the author on 29 January 2019.

from a radical Flemish nationalist environment himself. Ten years later De Wever published his landmark PhD on the history and collaboration of the Flemish National Union, made under the supervision of Herman Balthazar¹⁷⁸. De Wever's nearly 1000-page book confirmed the party's pre-war slide towards fascism and painstakingly deconstructed the myth of the party's collaboration as an 'idealistic', almost a-political, endeavour. The book was published at exactly the right moment. Its huge resonance in Flanders was further enhanced by De Wever's scholarly position and media presence. He would in the following decade vehemently continue to widely disseminate his research in countless publications, public lectures, debates and media-interventions. As professor of contemporary history at Ghent university, De Wever is currently one of Belgium's foremost WWII-historians and almost certainly the most mediatized. In terms of its direct impact on collective public memories and dominant narratives about WWII, *Greep naar de Macht* is certainly Flanders (and arguably Belgium's) single most influential and important work ever published.

The same year, the topic of collaboration by Léon Degrelle and Rex in Francophone Belgium was tackled by Martin Conway, a young Oxford historian who had picked up the French language (and an interest in Belgian history) during a previous working experience in Brussels¹⁷⁹. He initially aimed to do his PhD on Leopold III and the Royal Affair but quickly realized the essential archives remained difficult to access¹⁸⁰. Visits to the CWWII in Brussels made him land on Degrelle's collaboration years. The centre remained an essential academic basis for Conway throughout his PhD. Researchers like Alain Dantoing and Albert De Jonghe supported his research and the latter

helped provide him access to the military justice archives of prominent Rexists. A seminar at the centre led to his first publication in the centre's journal in 1986. Conway used different types of sources: official sources (of the military justice archives), press, private archives and even an interview with Degrelle himself. His book openly and critically analysed the still highly controversial figure of Degrelle and had a large impact, also because it was published in three languages (unlike De Wever's book, which was only published in Dutch).

That same year, the duo of Jan Velaers and Herman Van Goethem published the seminal work on Leopold III and the Royal Affair¹⁸¹. The book was something of an 'accident', as it was the spinoff of an ongoing passion project by both scholars regarding historical incidents where Belgian monarchs had lacked governmental support¹⁸². When in the framework of that particular project they tackled the chapter on Leopold III, they (in early 1993) found the documents at the CWWII that four years earlier had spelled the exit of Van Welkenhuyzen as director. Seizing the opportunity, Velaers and Van Goethem in record time wrote a 1263-page volume that was published (in Dutch) in 1994. Despite its length, this book was a huge commercial success as well, generating strong public debate.

Equally noteworthy is that during this same period, other essential themes also received standard works in the form of edited volumes. The most impactful, was probably the edited volume *'De democratie heruitgevonden'* (re-invented democracy), published in 1995 and edited by Luc Huyse and Kris Hoflack¹⁸³. With eleven thematic chapters (excluding introduction and conclusion)

178. BRUNO DE WEVER, *Oostfrontiers: Vlamingen in het Vlaams Legioen en de Waffen SS*, Tielt, 1984; Idem, *Greep naar de macht* (...).

179. MARTIN CONWAY, *Collaboration in Belgium: Léon Degrelle and the Rexist Movement 1940-1944*, New Haven/London, 1993.

180. Mail by Martin Conway to the author, 18 December 2018.

181. JAN VELAERS and HERMAN VAN GOETHEM, *Leopold III. De koning, het land, de oorlog*, Tielt, 1994.

182. Mail by Herman Van Goethem to the author, 3 January 2019.

183. LUC HUYSE and KRIS HOFACK (eds.), *De democratie heruitgevonden: oud en nieuw in politiek België, 1944-1950*, Leuven, 1995. In 1989, another classic edited volume had already tackled post-war political history: ELS WITTE, J.C. BURGELMAN and P. STOUTHUYSEN (eds.), *Tussen restauratie en vernieuwing: aspecten van de naoorlogse Belgische politiek (1944-1950)*, Brussel, 1989.

tackling the purges, the resistance, local government, the monarchy, the administration, the judiciary, the police, political parties and foreign relations the book remains a standard reference work on post-war politics and reconstruction between 1944 and 1950.

The topic of forced labour under occupation received an edited volume in 1993¹⁸⁴. It is a heterogeneous volume but remains a standard work to this day. Social reform in Belgium during and immediately after the occupation received an edited volume in 1995¹⁸⁵. Both of these volumes were the results of conferences. Because of their diverse and sometimes technical nature, public impact was weaker than with the previously mentioned monographs. In 1994, a reader was published with several contributions about the Belgian Jews between 1925 and 1945¹⁸⁶. It is also crucial to mention the remarkable effort by Brussels historian Peter Scholliers on living standards (prices, wages, food intake and material living conditions), within, among others, one of his essential publications in 1993¹⁸⁷.

Clear-cut periodisation is always artificial, yet it is hard to argue with this output. Between 1991 and 1995 many essential topics received studies that remain the standard reference to this day. For an important part, this was generation shift. A university-generation which had started research in the early or mid-1980s under the supervision of the first pioneers now published their landmark results. However, this was also a unique moment in time. On the one hand, the era in which witness-accounts had dominated the public arena

(1950s-1980s) was drawing to a close. On the other hand, there was not yet a well-established set of state sponsored memory policies in place (which would change after 1995). Television had launched historians to a higher level of public authority in the 1980s and, by 1990, the public arena lay open for the expert-historian. The major works published between 1991-1995 could impose their own conclusions on society and help to rupture the dominant narratives that had been 'frozen' for decades¹⁸⁸.

IV. Historians and the duty to remember (1995-2018)

Popular theories about communicative and cultural memory dictated that public interest in WWII would start to decline by 2000. Yet the exact opposite happened¹⁸⁹. Global shifts in the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* of the legacy of WWII also had an impact on Belgium, however, and Belgian historians found themselves playing a new game. This sometimes created an almost existential crisis.

Public Memory: Global Shifts

Global shifts occurred after the 1970s-1980s in the way societies dealt with (traumatic) national histories¹⁹⁰. Several postmodern 'turns' replaced the traditional certitudes of historical knowledge with fundamental doubt. The increasing importance of the Holocaust instigated a wave of ongoing new judicial trials, in France and Germany notably, and a series of national state sponsored commissions

184. *De verplichte tewerkstelling in Duitsland 1942-1945/Le travail obligatoire en Allemagne, 1942-1945*, Bruxelles, 1993.

185. *Het Sociaal Pact van 1944. Oorsprong, betekenis en gevolgen. Acta van het historisch luik van het colloquium '50 Jaar Sociaal Pact*, Bruxelles, 1995.

186. RUDI VAN DOORSLAER (ed.), *Les Juifs de Belgique. De l'immigration au génocide, 1925-1945*, Bruxelles, 1994.

187. PETER SCHOLLIERS, "Strijd rond de koopkracht, 1939-1945", in *België, een maatschappij in crisis en oorlog*, Brussel, 1993, p. 245-276.

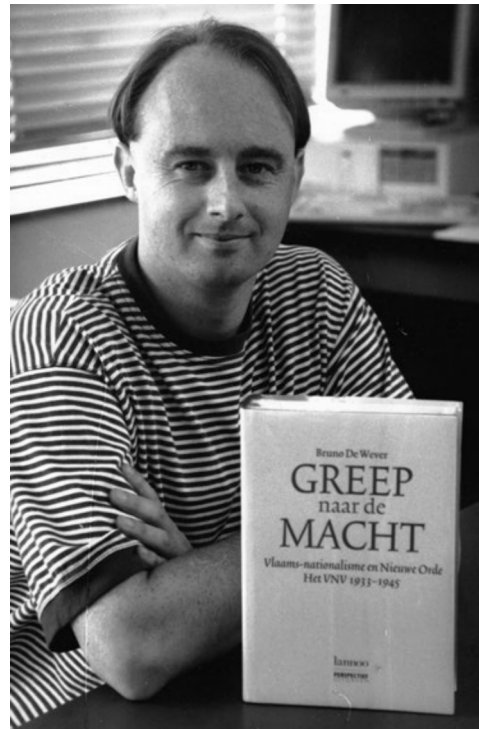
188. See for example also the reflections of Luc Huyse on this subject: DIRK LUYTEN and JOGGIE MEIUIZEN, *Luc Huyse: Interview...*, p. 280 and 288.

189. DANIEL E. ROGERS, *The Impact of Nazism. New Perspectives on the Third Reich and Its Legacy*, Nebraska, 2007.

190. This paragraph is loosely based on BERBER BEVERNAGE and NICO WOUTERS, "State-Sponsored History after 1945: An Introduction", in *Ibidem* (eds.), *The Handbook of State Sponsored History after 1945*, London, 2018, p. 1-39.



Onverwerkt Verleden (1991) by Luc Huyse and Steven Dondt ushered in a new era of public history. From now on, Belgium was 'sick of its unresolved past' and history became an instrument to achieve social and political reconciliation.



A proud Bruno De Wever (UGent) in 1994, showing his recently published book based on his massive doctoral thesis 'Grep naar de macht' (seizure of power). It might be the single most influential WWII-related book ever published in Flanders.

(often about restitutions and recompensation). The maturation of an international criminal justice system stimulated a turn towards a so-called 'judicialisation' of history. The Stockholm Forum of 2000 confirmed the integration of the Holocaust in official European memory¹⁹¹. The resulting focus on victim-centred approaches to history and memory stimulated a wave of official recognition of past injustices. State policies underscored the idea that 'resolving the past' could serve as a therapy for social trauma¹⁹².

Two other major shifts – the 'participatory turn' and the digital turn – created a democratization of knowledge production and distribution. As new actors appeared on the field of history and public memories, national states seemed to be able to answer with a pro-active policy. Synergies emerged between states and cultural NGOs and private companies (commemorative tourism, for example). New heritage paradigms modernized cultural nationalism. States stimulated a 'moral redress' of the past to strengthen their own self-legitimizing identity politics¹⁹³.

To summarise: society increasingly 'spoke back' to science. To the extent they had ever actually held that position, academic historians were clearly no longer the main gatekeepers of the past¹⁹⁴. More importantly, a vaguely defined 'public memory' became the central concept defining the public debate about history. That WWII-history was particularly sensitive to these shifts became visible during the commemorations in 1995 of the 50th anniversary of the end of WWII.

Accelerated memory policies in Belgium after 1995

Some of these changes took specific forms in Belgium and especially Flanders. The most visible was the electoral success of the xenophobic Flemish Nationalist *Vlaams Blok* (with the notorious 'Black Sunday' election in 1991). The traditional defensive stance towards Flemish-nationalist Nazi-collaboration – dominant in Flanders for decades – quickly lost its political appeal. Also, the history of WWII itself simply became less directly relevant for present day politics by the natural process of distance in time. The history of the war had been an essential part of Belgian divisions for decades (as seen in the amnesty-debate, for example) but this political urgency faded during the 1990s¹⁹⁵.

This created the necessary space for a moral redress of WWII in Belgium between 1991 and 2002. This flag was carried by two successive Belgian federal governments (1999-2003 and 2003-2004) under the liberal prime minister Guy Verhofstadt. A pro-active moral redress of past wrongdoings was an intrinsic part of Verhofstadt's aim to distinguish his government from the earlier Catholic-dominated governments¹⁹⁶. Where his Catholic predecessors had tried to avoid public statements regarding Belgium's darker pages in history, Verhofstadt seemed to embrace them. He apologized for the Belgian role in the Holocaust in 2002 in Mechelen and again in 2005 in Yad Vashem. This was followed by apologies by the Antwerp mayor in 2007, the Brussels mayor, and the then prime minister Elio Di Rupo in 2012. An important figure in this regard

191. JAN ECKEL und CLAUDIA MOISEL (eds), *Universalisierung des Holocaust? Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik in internationaler Perspektive*, Göttingen, 2008.

192. C. SYKES, *A Nation of Victims. The Decay of the American Character*, NY, 1992; F. FUREDI, "History as Therapy", in *Spiked*, nr. 5, 2008.

193. CHARLES TAYLOR, "The Politics of Recognition", in A. GUTMANN (ed.), *Multiculturalism. Examining the Politics of Recognition*, Princeton, 1994, p. 25-73.

194. For example: the rise of the global knowledge economy, which increasingly turned academic knowledge into an economic asset to enhance competitiveness, re-aligning the relationship between media, civil society, and (semi-)state administrations. BERBER BEVERNAGE and NICO WOUTERS, *State Sponsored History (...)*.

195. This came full circle, when N-VA president Bart De Wever in 2008 stated that WWII was a 'turned page'. KOEN AERTS, *De Bestrafing (...)*, p. 82.

196. MARC REYNEBEAU, "De losse eindjes van het verleden", in *Bulletin trimestriel de la Fondation Auschwitz/ Driemaandelijks tijdschrift van de Stichting Auschwitz* nr. 76-77, juillet-décembre 2002/juli-december 2002, p. 71-75.



Federal Minister of Defense André Flahaut (left) and Minister Didier Reynders (Science Policy) during the inauguration of the new building of CegeSoma at the Luchtvaartsquare/Square the l'Aviation on 7 September 2004. The fact CegeSoma could move to this building with relatively short notice was a testimony to Gotovitch's strong political network. This beautiful and modernist building, a design from architects Maxime and Fernand Brunfaut from 1932 and now a protected monument, was originally constructed for the Prévoyance Sociale. (Source : CegeSoma).



‘Collaboration in Flanders: to forgive and forget?’ (2002), edited by Eric Corijn, and ‘The weight of the past’ (2003), edited by José Gotovitch and Chantal Kesteloot, were two publications that explicitly tried to engage in ongoing social and political debates about democratic education and national reconciliation.



Lieven Saerens book (2000) about the Jewish community and their persecution in the city of Antwerp during WWII was hugely influential, although the book might not have been as widely read as it deserved because of its vast size. Its breakthrough conclusions, however, would reverberate for many years in other scholarly work, and in political debates.

was Patrick Dewael of the Flemish liberal party¹⁹⁷. Already in 1994, he had defended the idea of 'reconciliation' regarding the legacy of WWII¹⁹⁸. He actively supported the idea of a 'duty of memory' in 1999. As prime-minister (*minister-president*) of the Flemish government, Dewael launched the initiative for a new, Flemish, Holocaust Museum¹⁹⁹.

These ideological shifts coincided with an institutional overhaul. New Flemish and French-speaking government administrations were created, in fields as diverse as heritage, education and culture (which included commemorative policies). These new administrations and institutions did not develop policy based on a classic nation-building logic *per se*. They found ideological direction in the civic education role of commemorations and education. These new regional governments and administrations were more active in history and memory policies than the Belgian national level had ever been.

In 1994, *Démocratie ou Barbarie* was created by pioneering Holocaust scholar Maxime Steinberg, among others. It was a steering committee, or 'policy cell', tasked to coordinate history and memory work in service of human- and civic education, in the Francophone community in Belgium²⁰⁰. The *Fondation de la Mémoire contemporaine/Stichting voor de eigentijdse Herinnering* was created the

same year; an organisation dedicated to research on contemporary memories of Jewish victims and their descendants, which published a journal on contemporary memories²⁰¹. In 1990, King Baudouin called in a national address for a "pacification of the different communities" in Belgium, for which a reconciliation about WWII was deemed essential. King Albert II repeated the same appeal in 1994²⁰².

The Flemish government however decided to play *cavalier seul*. They installed a working group in May 1994 to "resolve the social consequences of the Second World War for victims of war and the victims of the post-war purges and the repression"²⁰³. On 21 December 1995, the Flemish parliament voted a resolution to close the period of "the Second World War and the repression with a reconciliatory gesture"²⁰⁴. The Flemish initiative ignored the Belgian context but also equated victimhood of Nazi-oppression with victimhood of Belgian post-war punishment of collaborators. The parliament of the French-speaking community protested in November 1996²⁰⁵. The so-called 'Suykerbuyk-decree' in June 1998 – a Flemish decree supported by the votes of the extreme-right *Vlaams Blok* – nevertheless tried to implement this vision²⁰⁶. This provoked formal complaints and the Flemish decree was annulled by the Belgian *Arbitragehof* on procedural grounds.

197. A member of Verhoofstadt's Flemish liberal party, he was the grandson of Arthur Vanderpoorten, a pre-war minister who had died in the camp of Bergen-Belsen in April 1945.

198. PATRICK DEWAELE, "De laatste getuigen", in *Bulletin trimestriel de la Fondation Auschwitz/Driemaandelijks tijdschrift van de Stichting Auschwitz*, nr. 76-77, Brussel/Bruxelles, 2002, p. 77-83.

199. Major political discussions. In 2002, the Auschwitz Foundation published a thematic issue on the direct cause of the decision to create a Flemish Holocaust Museum and the political debate on reconciliation on the Flemish level. *Bulletin trimestriel de la Fondation Auschwitz/Driemaandelijks tijdschrift van de Stichting Auschwitz*, nr. 76-77, juillet-décembre 2002/juli-december 2002. See: "Interview met Patrick Dewael Minister-president van de Vlaamse regering", in *Ibidem*, p. 83-89.

200. "Démocratie ou barbarie, 50 ans après": un défi pour l'école d'aujourd'hui. - Bruxelles: Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 1994. See: <http://www.democratieoubarbarie.cfwb.be/> In 2008 it published the *Mémento de la citoyenneté en Communauté française*.

201. *Les Cahiers de la Mémoire contemporaine/Bijdragen tot de eigentijdse Herinnering*, 1999 – (...), Brussel/Bruxelles. <http://www.fmc-seh.be>

202. *Toespraak tot de Overheden van het Land*, Paleis te Brussel, 1.2.1994. Consulted on 22 November 2018 at: www.monarchie.be.

203. *Vlaamse Raad, documenten, Regeringsverklaring 21 juni 1995*, nr. 10, p. 40.

204. *Vlaamse Raad, documenten, Resolutie betreffende een verklaring van algemene verzoening tussen de Vlamingen*, 21 December 1995, nr. 191/2.

205. KOEN AERTS, *De Bestrafing* (...), p. 76.

206. RIK HEMMERJCKX, "Het Vlaams parlement en het debat over het oorlogsverleden", in *Bulletin trimestriel de la Fondation Auschwitz*, nr. 76-77, juillet-décembre 2002/juli-december 2002, p. 113-119.

The Flemish government was presented an alternative by the so-called 'Voorwaarts'-group (see further). The Flemish government gratefully fell back on this academic initiative and rewarded it with an official government award in 2001²⁰⁷. This more nuanced take on the legacy of WWII made the Flemish parliament vote a resolution on 20 March 2002 (approved 82 votes to 20), holding "recommendations regarding dealing with the war-past of Flanders"²⁰⁸. The resolution recognised the mistakes of the post-war repression (as demonstrated by Huyse and Dhondt in 1991) but created a distinction with the 'bigger' mistake of Nazi-collaboration. More importantly, it confirmed that historical research was a key-instrument against non-democratic ideas and parties. A symbolic moment was the dismissal of Johan Sauwens in May 2001, a minister in the Flemish government who was forced to resign because he had attended a social event of former Flemish Waffen-SS members. This marked the fact that something had fundamentally changed in Flanders over the course of ten years.

While Flanders now had its official vision on WWII, a similar Belgian attempt failed. A federal parliamentary resolution (in October 2002) proposing that CegeSoma would coordinate a national study about collaboration and its consequences – in order to improve the "mutual understanding between Flemings and French-speaking peoples in Belgium about what happened during

the Second World War" – was not approved²⁰⁹. French-speaking political parties feared such initiatives would be perceived as a form of 'amnesty' or 'forgiveness' for collaborators²¹⁰. King Baudouin's call for national reconciliation had backfired.

Belgian parliament was on another road. On 23 March 1995 it voted a law to punish denial, minimization or approval of the genocide perpetrated by the German national-socialist regime during WWII: the so-called 'negationism'-law²¹¹. In July 1997, as the last country in Western-Europe to do so, the Belgian government created the Study Commission on the possessions of members of the Jewish Community in Belgium²¹². The final report was published in 2001 (available online) and, as a result, the government created the "Commission for Reparation" (made law on 20 December 2001), tasked to coordinate financial reparations²¹³. At its closure in December 2007, the commission had approved reparation payments for a total of 35,2 million euros in 5220 cases.

The Belgian Senate's law of 8 May 2003 appointed CegeSoma to do research on the responsibilities of Belgian public authorities and administrations in the persecution of the Jewish population in Belgium during WWII. The final report was published in two languages in 2007²¹⁴. A summary of the results was made for schools by historian Anne Roekens and published in 2010 (in Dutch in

207. KOEN AERTS, *De Bestrafing (...)*, p. 77-78.

208. Vlaams parlement, Documenten, Resolutie betreffende de aanbevelingen inzake het omgaan met het oorlogsverleden van Vlaanderen, 20.3.2002, nr. 997/4.

209. Parlementaire Documenten, Kamer, Voorstel van resolutie "betreffende het onderzoek over de oorzaken en de gevolgen (...)" 30 October 2002, nr. 2105/001. The resolution was abrogated on 10 April 2003.

210. The letters of Francophone political representatives about this issue, reproduced in the thematic issue were clear to this regard.

211. Law of 23 March 1995 (BS/MB 30 March 1995).

212. It had to study this in the financial sector, real estate, insurances, enterprises, the diamant sector, art objects, other material possessions. Royal Decree 6 July 1997, MB/BS 12 July 1997. RUDI VAN DOORSLAER, "De spoliatie en restitutie van de Joodse bezittingen in België en het onderzoek van de Studiecommissie", in *BEG-CHTP*. n° 10, Brussel, SOMA, 2002, p. 81. "Commissie voor de schadeloosstelling van de leden van de Joodse gemeenschap van België voor hun goederen die werden geplunderd of achtergelaten tijdens de oorlog 1940-1945. Eindrapport", in *Combuysse.fgov.be*. 4 februari 2008, p. 1. http://www.combuysse.fgov.be/nl/eindrapport_commissie_schadeloosstelling_2_nl.pdf.

213. MB/BS 24 January 2001.

214. RUDI VAN DOORSLAER, FRANK SEBERECHTS, EMMANUEL DEBRUYNE and NICO WOUTERS, *Gewillig België. Overheid en Jodenvervolg tijdens WO II/La Belgique docile: les autorités belges et la persécution des Juifs en Belgique durant la Seconde Guerre mondiale*, Brussel/Bruxelles, 2007.

2011), supported by the Francophone and Flemish communities. In 2009, the Francophone community published the decree (13 March 2009) on the transfer of the memories of crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and acts of resistance: the main goal was to use history to promote civic and democratic education. Belgium became member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust, Education, Remembrance and Research (IHRA). In December 2012, during the Belgian presidency of the IRHA, the new Museum, Documentation Centre and Memorial for the Holocaust and Human Rights (Kazerne Dossin) opened its doors in Mechelen. Although it dealt with the Belgian case, it was institutionally a Flemish centre. This new museum also coordinated the 'Special Committee for Remembrance Education', in which several academic and cultural actors were brought together to mediate between education policy and different school systems. By 2012, the Holocaust was firmly rooted in memory education and agendas of anti-racism²¹⁵. The centenary of WWI, between 2014 and 2018, created unprecedented attention to the other 'Great War', with the next anniversary of 75 years of liberation in 2019 and 2020 right behind the corner²¹⁶. Suffice to say, 1995 marked a moment of acceleration and reinforcement of memory policies related to WWII in Belgium.

From l'An 40 to Onverwerkt Verleden: The new Public Historian

Most 'golden era' works published between 1991-1995 had followed the model laid out by *L'An 40*

in 1971. To a large part of the scholarly generation that came after, this book showed that deconstructing national and political myths through 'objective' research was the underlying *raison d'être* for fundamental WWII-research. This 'model', however, came under pressure after 1995. The main historical battles in Belgium seemed won and the evident authoritative role of WWII historians diminished.

'*Onverwerkt verleden*', the book by Huyse and Dhondt from 1991, now replaced *L'An 40* as the new 'programmatorical book' for the post-1995 era. In its explicit pleading for reconciliation and a truth initiative, their book aligned itself perfectly with ongoing social changes²¹⁷. It didn't transcend ongoing political debates; it made itself part of them. Its title – the 'unresolved past' – would quickly become iconic. The opening sentences were: "Belgium is sick of its 1940s. It suffers from a neurosis created by collaboration and its punishment". This book launched the idea that Belgium's WWII-history was permanently 'unresolved' and framed this in clinical, pathological terms. And if the past was a disease, then historians might hold the cure. Exactly this viewpoint was the central objective of a 1992 publication about the extreme-right in Flanders, for example²¹⁸.

Onverwerkt Verleden made the idea of a more activist public historian in Belgium legitimate. This resonated with a generation that had now reached academic maturity. As Rudi Van Doorslaer argues, many of his (larger) generation had chosen the topic of WWII out of a personal social-ideological conviction²¹⁹. In terms of impact on a scholarly community, I would there-

215. See for an overview: *Na de Holocaust. Recente Belgische initiatieven. Onderwijs. Herinnering. Onderzoek. Morele en materiële schadeloosstelling*, Kancelarij Eerste Minister, Brussel, 2012.

216. "The Centenary commemorations of the Great War in Belgium. History and the Politics of Memory", in *Low Countries Historical Review*, 131-3 (2016), p. 76-86.

217. LUC HUYSE, *Alles gaat voorbij, behalve het verleden*, Leuven, 2006; BERBER BEVERNAGE, "De hete adem van het verleden: over het verleden dat niet voorbij wil gaan en het 'presence'-debat in de geschiedfilosofie", in *CHTP-BEG*, 2007; nr. 18, p. 183-198.

218. RUDI VAN DOORSLAER and JOSÉ GOTOVITCH (eds.), *Herfsttij van de 20^{ste} eeuw: extreem-rechts in Vlaanderen 1920-1990*, Leuven, 1992, p. 132.

219. *De Maatschappelijke rol van geschiedenis. Historici aan het woord. Standpunt Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België voor Wetenschappen en Kunsten*, Brussel, 2010. Online: http://www.kvab.be/sites/default/rest/blobs/486/mw_maatschappelijke_rol_geschiedenis.pdf.

fore argue that *L'An 40* and *Onverwerkt Verleden* are the two most influential books on WWII ever written in Belgium.

Nevertheless, a certain unease now became apparent. The influential French historian Henry Roussio – popular in Belgium too and an expert on Vichy-collaboration himself – feared that ‘empirical history’ would gradually be replaced by what he called the ‘cult of memory’, a post-modern ‘rememorialisation’ of history²²⁰. Belgium had nothing resembling a real *Historikerstreit* or a ‘History War’. But the unease trickled through. In 1995, Antoon van Braembussche wrote about the “exhaustion of history” because he felt commemorations and memories were replacing history²²¹. In 2000, Gotovitch warned of the political hold of politics over history and memory, among others through new regional culture policies²²². In 2006, historian Philippe Raxhon (Université de Liège, Ulg) wrote about the “crisis of history”, although most of his concrete examples were actually about France²²³. The most vocal expression of this general concern was an opinion piece in 2006 published simultaneously in Dutch and French under the title “the difference between remembering and history”²²⁴. No less than 115 leading Belgian scholars in contemporary history voiced concern about the growing importance of a state-imposed ‘duty to remember’²²⁵.

The apex of WWII historiography between 1991-1995 gave out in a paradoxical situation. Many

of the historians that were suspicious about the stronger role of politics in history and memory were themselves staunch defenders of the fact that historical research (about WWII) should continue to play an active societal role²²⁶.

These paradoxes became apparent in the *Transit Mechelen* and the *Voorwaarts* (‘Forwards’) initiative (‘Moving Forwards without Forgetting’)²²⁷. The latter emerged in 1998 in reaction to the aforementioned Suykerbuyk-decree. A group of mostly leftist intellectuals launched a call for a ‘just evaluation of the history of the occupation’. In their defence of reconciliation, the group aligned itself with the Flemish government’s policy at that moment. In the subsequent failure to lift this reconciliatory objective to the Belgian national level, historians decided to take over. CegeSoma published a book, simultaneously in both languages, edited by José Gotovitch and Chantal Kesteloot, with all main Belgian WWII-historians. This book can be considered as a scholarly response to the failed Belgian reconciliatory agenda. The underlying aim was almost to project a scholarly consensus on a political agenda. As both editors wrote in their conclusion: “historians, both in the north and the south of the country, do not hold fundamentally different opinions anymore”²²⁸.

In the same ‘activist’ vein, Charta 91 (a civil society initiative created after the Black Sunday elections of 1991) co-organized a conference on 24 November 2001 (exactly ten years after the

220. HENRY ROUSSIO, *The Haunting Past: History, Memory, and Justice in Contemporary France*, Philadelphia, 2002.

221. ANTOON VAN DEN BRAEMBUSSCHE, “Literatuur en de impact van de Tweede Wereldoorlog in België: een proeve van synthese”, in DIRK DE GEEST (e.a., eds.), *Hun kleine oorlog: de invloed van de Tweede Wereldoorlog op het literaire leven in België*, Leuven, 1998, p. 319-335.

222. JOSÉ GOTOVITCH, “Voorwoord”, in *CegeS/Soma Berichtenblad*, nr. 35, 2001, p. 3-5.

223. PHILIPPE RAXHON, “Conclusion. Tacite est bien dans l’Empire”, in LAURENCE VAN YPERSELE (ed.), *Questions d’histoire contemporaine: conflits, mémoires et identités*, Paris, 2006, p. 223-245 (p. 226).

224. “Geschiedenis is meer dan herinneren”, in *De Standaard*, 25.1.2006; “Het verschil tussen herinnering en geschiedenis”, in *De Morgen*, 25.1.2006. “Pléthore de mémoire: quand l’État se mêle d’histoire...”, in *Le Soir*, 25.1.2006.

225. WERNER GOEGEBEUR EN KAREL VAN NIEUWENHUYSE, “De socialiserende rol van de historische vorming in het secundair onderwijs: actuele spanningen”, in *De Maatschappelijke rol van geschiedenis (...)*, p. 63-76.

226. José Gotovitch himself criticized state commissioned history in 2006, at the same time that his own institute (CegeSoma) was finishing the state commissioned research on the Jewish persecutions in Belgium (see above).

227. FRANS-JOS VERDOODT, “Woord vooraf”, in FRANS-JOS VERDOODT, (ed.), *Voorwaarts maar niet vergeten*, Gent, 2001, p. 6-10.

228. JOSÉ GOTOVITCH AND CHANTAL KESTELOOT (eds.), *Het gewicht van het oorlogsverleden*, Gent, 2003 (quote: p. 207).



José Gotovitch (left) and Rudi Van Doorslaer during the press conference in 2005 of the intermediary report of what would become 'Gewillig België/La Belgique Docile'. Van Doorslaer led this project, commissioned by the Belgian senate, resulting in some unease among colleagues – including Gotovitch himself – because it implied that only the selected number of historians from the research team received access to sources that remained closed to the broader research community and the public at large. (Source : CegeSoma).

'Black Sunday election'), the result of which was published in an edited volume managed by the left-wing urban geographer Eric Corijn (VUB)²²⁹. As with the Gotovitch-Kesteloot volume, this was a purely scholarly volume, albeit with an underlying societal or even political agenda. Corijn tried to use this book to counteract the political closure that the Flemish government had tried to create in 2001 by officially awarding the *Voorwaarts*-initiative: "History cannot be closed with one stroke of the pen. (...) If the connections are not brought to the surface, no page can be turned"²³⁰.

Arguably the most essential litmus test was the 'Transit Mechelen' project. Flemish prime minister Dewael's decision of 2011 to enlarge the existing (private) 'Jewish Museum for Deportation and Resistance' implied a fundamental upgrade with new architecture and a new permanent exhibition that would integrate contemporary ideas of human rights and peace education. When the first state-initiated report in 2003 created criticism from academics, Flemish prime minister Bart Somers (who succeeded Dewael) created a scientific committee of nine scholars on 3 February 2004, presided by Bruno De Wever (Ghent), that could provide this political project with the necessary legitimacy and backbone²³¹. This scientific committee provided a report and scenario for the new 'Flemish Holocaust Museum' in September 2005. However, the government publicly distanced itself from this commissioned report, which was ultimately shelved. Several factors are responsible for the failure of *Transit Mechelen*: a political shift from a liberal prime minister to

a Catholic prime minister (Yves Leterme), internal institutional competitions – the curator of the existing museum opposed the final report – ongoing concern from the Jewish communities and a self-sabotaging media strategy of some individual committee members. In the specific framework of this contribution, I would like to focus on one element.

I would like to argue that with *Transit Mechelen*, with *Voorwaarts* and the previously mentioned edited volumes, Belgian historians applied the old 'An 40' model to an entirely new context. These academics simply assumed that their deconstructive, taboo-breaking and sometimes disruptive approaches would determine the outcome when it was supported by the authority of fundamental research. However, they found out that despite the seemingly more open nature of these state initiatives, the rules of the game had actually become more rigid and much more institutionalized than before 1995. Other 'mediators with history' that had emerged proved far more proficient at this new game. Indeed, the reason Herman Van Goethem (University of Antwerp) would ultimately succeed where his academic colleagues of *Transit Mechelen* had failed had more to do with strategic diplomacy than with differences in historical vision.

In short, the new public historians were confronted with the fact that in the 2000s, WWII had become much less about actual history and much more about how political or moral weight could be maximized to impact upon present day agendas²³².

229. ERIC CORIJN (red.), *Collaboratie in Vlaanderen. Vergeten en vergeven?*, Antwerpen, 2002.

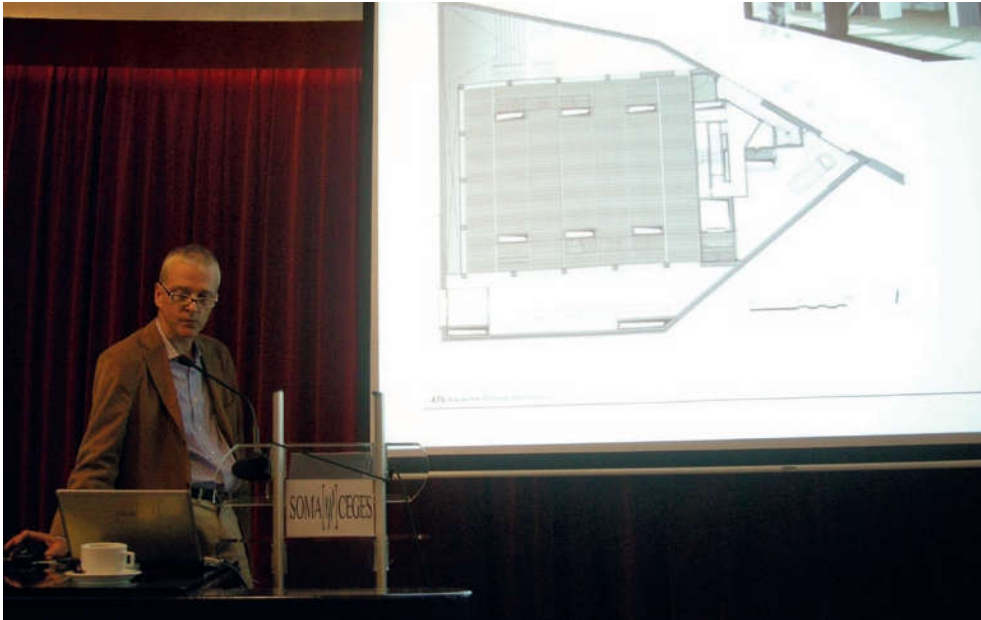
230. Translation by the author. ERIC CORIJN, "Woord vooraf", in *Ibidem*, p. 9.

231. BART BRINCKMAN, "Invulling Holocaustmuseum geen eenvoudige klus", in *Driemaandelijks tijdschrift van de Stichting Auschwitz*, nr. 76-77, juillet-décembre 2002/juli-december 2002, p. 99-103. RUBEN VANDAELE, *Herinneringsconflict. Een analyse van de genese van het museum Kazerne Dossin in Mechelen*, unpublished MA-thesis dept. History, Ghent University, 2015; GIE VAN DEN BERGHE, "Een uniek Vlaams holocaustmuseum", in *Serendib.be*. 9 december 2001. <<<http://www.serendib.be/artikels/eenuniekvlaamsholocaustmuseum.htm>>>; Idem, "Geen holocaustmuseum", in *Serendib.be*. 2004. <http://www.serendib.be/artikels/geenholocaustmuseum.htm>. Consulted online 20 October 2018.

232. MARTIN CONWAY, *The End(s) of Memory* (...).



Presentation of the book publication and final report of *Gewillig België – La Belgique Docile* in the Belgian Senate on 13 February 2007. This commissioned history project was important for CegeSoma, as it confirmed its continuing legitimacy as a historic institute dealing with national historical traumas. Some politicians responsible for ordering the research were surprised by the sometimes critical conclusions of the research. (Source: CegeSoma).



Herman Van Goethem (UA) in the conference room of CegeSoma on 20 October 2010, giving a sneak preview of the future architecture and interior design of what would become Kazerne Dossin, the Holocaust Museum and Memorial that would open its doors to the public in November 2012. After the scientific committee of historians (Transit Mechelen) had been discredited, Van Goethem took over as the central 'curator' of the project. He repeatedly declared never to have read the report of his colleagues.



A new generation, moving beyond the 'golden era' of WWII-historiography: Aline Sax (above) and Koen Aerts in respectively 2012 and 2014, presenting the publications of their doctorate research in the CegeSoma Conference Room, about Flemish nationalist collaboration (Sax) and post-war purges (the repression) in Belgium (Aerts). (Source: CegeSoma).



Changing perspectives between 1994-2019. In 1994, historian Frank Seberechts published his influential book 'Ieder zijn zwarte', focussing on the traumatic experiences of Flemish (alleged) collaborators being abused in waves of popular justice after the liberation (the 'street repression'). In 2019, the same historian published 'Drang naar het Oosten' about war crimes perpetrated by Flemish Eastern Front volunteers. While the first book was often interpreted as support for the Flemish nationalists' identity of victimhood (the anti-Flemish repression), the second book was exactly the opposite, as it consciously de-bunked the enduring myth of the idealistic, almost romantic, Flemish Eastern Front fighter who never engaged in any kind of systematic violence against civilians.

Historiographic Impressions (1995-2018)

Despite these 'memorial challenges', historical research thrived to such an extent some limitations must be applied for the scope of the coming observations²³³. The following graphics are made based on the bibliography of Dirk Luyten (1997-2006)²³⁴.

Themes	Number of publications
Inventories	249
Racial Persecution	146
Resistance	140
Memories	119
Socio-Economic	110
Post-W. Purges	79
Invasion	75
Liberation	65
Culture	60
Collaboration	50
Royal Affair	45
Administration	42
German Occupier	27
Forced Labour	14

WWII studies 1997-2006 per topic

For the successive period (2009 and after) we rely on the online bibliography about Belgium (commenced in 2009)²³⁵. Unlike the earlier WWII bib-

liographies of Meyers and Luyten, it does not use thematic sub-categories and often the title of a publication does not clearly indicate its content. With this large caveat, we can say it gives a different picture of the period after 2009. Roughly 25% of all publications between 2009-2017 were related to racial persecution and German repression (against the resistance), very often from a micro-angle (see further). Culture and propaganda on the one hand, and inventories on the other, each represented about 6% for the same period. For the rest, it was remarkable to see that the works specifically tackling the larger themes (resistance, collaboration, post-war purges, religious history, forced labour, education, the Royal Affair, but also memory and commemorations) represented very small percentages of the overall production. Micro-history and German persecution were the only two clearly distinguishable dominant trends for WWII-related production between 2009 and 2017.

Zooming in, we can surmise the following impressions. The resistance seemed to receive a resurgence. It remains a strongly researched subject, although mainly in Francophone works²³⁶. The resistance press remained an important source, as well as a topic of research²³⁷. Emmanuel Debruyne published several essential works on the resistance intelligence services, also focussing on the social profiles of its members²³⁸. Karolien Steen used the city of Ghent as a case through which to conduct her PhD research on the local resistance²³⁹. In 2018, two new PhD research-pro-

233. BRUNO DE WEVER, "Laat nu ook de geschiedenis oordelen", in DIRK LUYTEN and CHANTAL KESTELOOT (eds.), *Acta van de studiedag over het gebruik van de gerechtelijke archieven m.b.t. de repressie na de Tweede Wereldoorlog – Dossier : Repressie en gerechtelijke archieven : problemen en perspectieven*, Brussel, 2002.

234. Taking over from W.C. Meyers, Dirk Luyten maintained the annual bibliography of works published about Belgium in WWII between 1997 and 2006 in the *Bulletin du Ceges/Soma Berichtenblad*. For this overview, I only included works related to WWII stricto sensu (excluding too heterogeneous categories such as 'personalia' or works spanning a larger chronology).

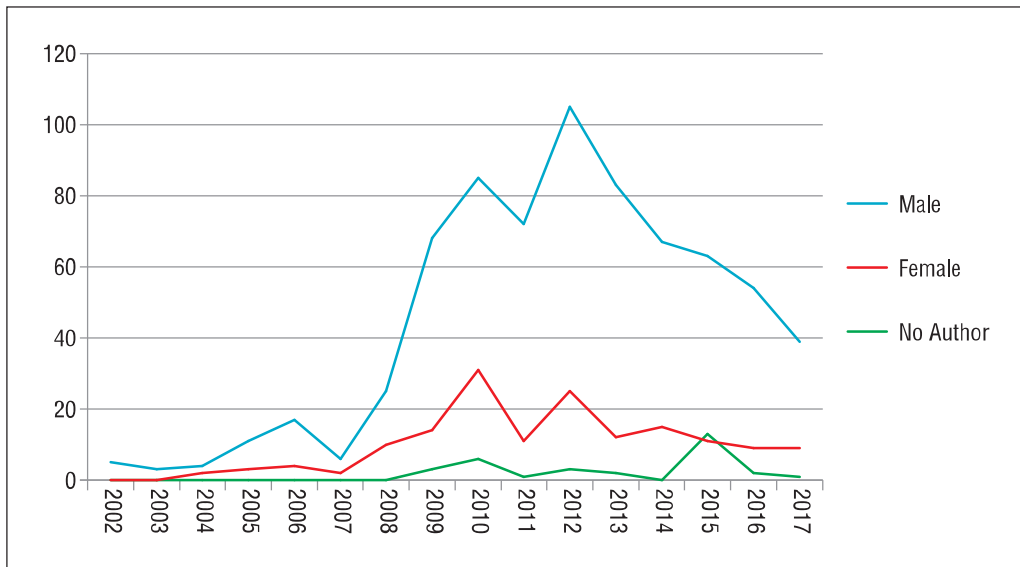
235. See: <http://biblio.arch.be/webopac/vubis.csp?Profile=BHBBGB> (consulted 21 December 2018). This bibliography includes publications from the same year as its own conception in 2009.

236. FABRICE MAERTEN, "L'historiographie de la résistance belge : à la recherche de la patrie perdue", in LAURENT DOUZOU (ed.), *Faire l'histoire de la Résistance : actes du colloque international*, Rennes, 2010, p. 257-276.

237. *Tegendruk : de geheime pers tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, Gent/Brussel/Antwerpen/Gent, 2004.

238. EMMANUEL DEBRUYNE, *C'était Tégal : un réseau de renseignements en Belgique occupée, 1940-1944*, Bruxelles, 2003; Idem, *La guerre secrète des espions belges 1940-1944*, Bruxelles, 2008.

239. KAROLIEN STEEN, *De schemerzone van een stad in oorlog : de evolutie van het verzet in Gent (1940-1944), van ongestructureerde initiatieven tot georganiseerde verzetsbewegingen*, Unpublished Doctorate Thesis, Gent, 2007.



Male/Female Authors 2002-2017 WWII publications

jects started, by Michèle Corthals (Antwerp) about women in the resistance and Babette Weyns (Ghent) about post-war resistance memories.

Despite MA-theses and articles, collaboration remained relatively under-researched in French-speaking Belgium²⁴⁰. A landmark study about French-speaking military collaborators was published in 2008 by Flore Plisnier²⁴¹. Eddy De Bruyne continued his remarkable personal research and publication effort, even publishing a collaboration 'encyclopedia' in 2016²⁴². Francis Balace remained one of the main specialists of the extreme-right in French-speaking Belgium

related to WWII-history (in particular collaboration, resistance, and the military)²⁴³.

In Flanders, collaboration-research focussed more in-depth on 'ordinary' collaborators; considering their political ideas as well as their social histories and post-war experiences. Seberechts and Verdoodt researched exiled collaborators who had fled Belgium after the war²⁴⁴. A further advancement of De Wever's seminal work of 1994 was the PhD of Aline Sax. Using the methodology of discourse analysis, she concluded that national-socialism and the figure of Hitler were far stronger motivational pull-factors for rank and file Flemish

240. Emblematic, for example, was the *Encyclopédie du Mouvement wallon* (2000-2001) did not even have an item on Degrelle. MAARTEN VAN GINDERACHTER, "L'introuvable opposition entre le régionalisme citoyen wallon et le nationalisme ethnique flamand. À propos de l'Encyclopédie du Mouvement wallon", ...", in *CHTP-BEG*, IX (2004) 13-14, p. 67-96

241. FLORE PLISNIER, *Ils ont pris les armes pour Hitler*, Bruxelles, 2008.

242. EDDY DE BRUYNE, *Encyclopédie de l'occupation, de la collaboration et de l'Ordre nouveau en Belgique francophone (1940-1945)*, La Roche-en-Ardenne, 2016.

243. Among others: FRANCIS BALACE, "Le thème autoritaire dans la Résistance belge; de "l'ordre national" au "retour à la démocratie"", in *Les courants politiques et la Résistance: continuités ou ruptures? Colloque international*, Luxembourg/Bruxelles, 2002, p. 335-364.

244. FRANK SEBERECHTS and FRANS-JOS VERDOOD, *Leven in twee werelden: Belgische collaborateurs en de diaspora na de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, Leuven, 2009.

collaborators than previously assumed²⁴⁵. Another essential work was Koen Aerts' *Kinderen van de repressie* from 2018²⁴⁶. This research about children of Flemish collaborators was mainly driven by an oral history approach, but ultimately combined an ambitious fusion of cultural, political and social history. Another seminal work focusing on children was Gerlinda Swillen's research on children born from German-Belgian parents²⁴⁷.

During the 1980s the history of the judiciary and the post-war purges had only been researched prudently but, after *Onverwerkt Verleden*, in 1991 the door was kicked wide open. Dirk Luyten published an essential volume on the post-war purges of economic collaboration in 1996²⁴⁸. In 2017, Koen Aerts (Ghent) published his PhD about the longer-term impact of the Belgian purge-policies²⁴⁹. Chronologically it began where Huyse and Dhondt had stopped, but it also re-evaluated Huyse and Dhondt and the debate on the construction of post-war myths and memories. But the overall list is large and diverse. One example is Jonas Campion's international comparative PhD about the purges in the *Gendarmerie*²⁵⁰. The purges from a gender perspective were tackled by, among others, Machteld De Metsenaere, Sophie Bollen

and Carolien Van Loon²⁵¹. The theme now also became popular for many MA research projects in several Belgian universities²⁵².

The most essential research and historiographical effort was coordinated by Xavier Rousseaux of the *Centre d'histoire du droit et de la justice* at UCL. His research project 'Justice and Populations' gathered 69 partners and researchers and combined both the First and the Second World War²⁵³. As a multi-disciplinary project – aligned with international research agendas – it was a project on a scale quite unique for the field of Belgian WWII-related studies. In the huge output of this project there were several essential ones about WWII. These included PhD research by, among others, Lawrence Van Haecke about the politics behind the construction of the post-war purge policies (2014), Jan-Julia Zurné about the attitude of the Belgian magistrates vis-à-vis the armed resistance (2017), Dimitri Roden about German repression (2018) and the ongoing research of Gertjan Leenders about denunciations (all of which were Ghent University PhDs)²⁵⁴. Rousseaux himself was a very prolific researcher during this period as well, with a large scope from WWI to WWII²⁵⁵.

245. ALINE SAX, *Voor Vlaanderen, Volk en Führer: de motivatie en het wereldbeeld van Vlaamse collaborateurs tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog 1940-1945*, Antwerpen, 2012.

246. KOEN AERTS, *Kinderen van de repressie* (...).

247. GERLINDA SWILLEN, *Koekoekskind: door de vijand verwekt (1940-1945)*, Antwerpen/Amsterdam, 2009.

248. DIRK LUYTEN, *Burgers boven elke verdenking? Vervolgelingen van economisch collaboratie in België na de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, Bruxelles, 1996.

249. KOEN AERTS, "Repressie zonder maat of einde?": *de juridische reïntegratie van collaborateurs in de Belgische Staat na de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, Gent, 2014.

250. JONAS CAMPION, *Les Gendarmes belges, français et néerlandais à la sortie de la Seconde Guerre mondiale*, Bruxelles, 2011.

251. Among others: SOFIE BOLLEN and MACHTELD DE METSENAERE, "Vrouwen en bestrafing van de collaboratie na de Tweede Wereldoorlog: twee casestudies over incivieke vrouwen in de naoorlogse zuivering", in *Genderstudies, een genre apart? = Savoirs de genre, quel genre de savoir?*, Brussel, 2006, p. 176-205; CAROLIEN VAN LOON, "De geschorene en de scheerster: de vrouw in de straatrepressie na de Tweede Wereldoorlog", in *CHTP/BEG*, 1996, 2008, nr. 19, p. 45-78.

252. See: KOEN AERTS, *De Bestrafing* (...), p. 79-81.

253. See the project's website for all information: <http://www.bejust.be/> (consulted on 21 January 2019).

254. LAWRENCE VAN HAECKE, *Repressie en epuratie: de bescherming van de uitwendige veiligheid van de Staat als politiek-juridisch probleem tijdens de Belgische regimecrisis (1932-1948)*, unpublished Doctorate Thesis, Ghent, 2014; JAN JULIA ZURNÉ, *Tussen twee vuren: Gerecht en verzet tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, Tiel, 2017; GERTJAN LEENDERS, *Verklidders in Duitse dienst in Antwerpen en hun gerechtelijke vervolging na de Eerste Wereldoorlog*, in *JBH*, XLVII, 2017, 2-3, p. 40-73; DIMITRI RODEN, *Ondankbaar België. De Duitse repressie in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, Amsterdam, 2018.

255. Specifically on WWII, among others: XAVIER ROUSSEAU, *Guerre(s) et droit(s): l'impact des deux guerres mondiales sur la justice pénale belge*, in GEORGES MARTYN (et.al. eds.) *The Legal History of the Twentieth Century*, Brussels, 2006, p. 167-204; BENOÎT MAJERUS and XAVIER ROUSSEAU, "The World Wars and Their Impact on the Belgian Police System", in CYRILLE FIJNAUT, *The Impact of World War II on Policing in North-West Europe*, Leuven, 2004, p. 43-90.



Xavier Rousseaux (UCL) during the conference about WWII-sources at the State Archives in Belgium. As the central coordinator – amongst others – of the vast ‘Justice and Populations’ network, he had a big impact on the advancement of the research in this field, as well as on the diachronic comparisons between WWI and WWII and the valorisation of judicial sources. (Source : State Archives).



Martin Conway (Oxford), delivering his opening keynote-speech during the conference ‘Towards a new History of the Second World War’ on 21 April 2015 in The Hague. After his PhD-research on Léon Degrelle, Conway maintained a keen interest in the history of Belgium, resulting in, amongst others, his 2012 publication ‘The Sorrows of Belgium’. (Source : CegeSoma).



The panel in a pensive mood during the conference on WWII-sources at the State Archives in Belgium on 25 February 2010. From left to right : Lawrence Van Haecke (then CegeSoma), Luis Angel Bernardo Y Garcia, Michaël Amara, Pierre-Alain Tal-lier, Karel Velle, Laurence Druetz and Paul Drossens (all State Archives in Belgium). The wave of transfers of large WWII-col-lections to the State Archives was in full swing at that time (Source : State Archives).

Another important university effort on the topic of post-war purges and legal measures came from Pieter Lagrou at ULB, who supervised MA- and PhD-research about post-war trials (First and Second World War), with a focus on war crimes²⁵⁶. Rousseaux and Lagrou's essential research projects gave an enormous boost to judicial history during and around WWII (and WWI). Other related research considered the penitentiary system or the judiciary police²⁵⁷.

Holocaust studies remained a major theme as well. A landmark work was Lieven Saeren's published PhD about Jews in the city of Antwerp (published in Dutch and later also in French). Saerens would continue to publish about the history of antisemitism in Belgium and Jewish persecution under occupation²⁵⁸. Thierry Rozenblum researched Jewish Persecution in Liège²⁵⁹. The already mentioned state commissioned *Belgique Docile-Gewillig België* (2007) tackled responsibilities of Belgian authorities. Steinberg, among others, published several larger syntheses²⁶⁰. Another landmark book was Insa Meinen's 'The Shoah in Belgium' (published in Dutch, French and German), which focussed on the role of the German occupier²⁶¹. Her work also has significant importance as one

of the rare studies with a focus on the German occupier. Works were written as well about the rescue of Jewish children, post-war reconstruction and the transitcamp Kazerne Dossin as a *lieux de mémoire*²⁶².

Socio-economic or classic political history received less popular attention but thrived as a scholarly field. Topics such as food supply, labour history, economic history, daily life, and forced labour remained popular, including MA-theses research²⁶³. Dirk Luyten studied corporatism during the war, analysing how new corporatist organizations took over economic regulation from the Belgian state under occupation²⁶⁴. Another important strand was the history of the unions and labour movements and the employers' organizations²⁶⁵. Perhaps a difference with earlier eras was that progress in these fields had not occurred through large, influential books. In very general terms, production happened more through articles. Particularly noteworthy was the landmark study by Luis Bernardo y Garcia on food supply²⁶⁶. Prime examples of financial history were Crombois' biography of Gutt or the books by Van der Wee and Verbreyt about monetary policies and the National Bank²⁶⁷.

256. Among others: CÉLINE PRÉAUX, *La Gestapo devant ses juges en Belgique*, Brussel, 2007.

257. MARC VERSCHOORIS, *De gebroken arm der wet: De gerechtelijke politie bij het parket van Gent 1937-1947*, 2018; HELEN GREVERS, *Van landverraders tot goede vaderlanders: de opsluiting van collaborateurs in Nederland en België, 1944-1950*, Amsterdam, 2013.

258. LIEVEN SAERENS, *De jodenjagers van de Vlaamse SS: gewone Vlamingen?*, Tielt, 2007.

259. THIERRY ROZENBLUM, *Une cité si ardente ... Les Juifs de Liège sous l'Occupation (1940-1944)*, Bruxelles, 2010.

260. MAXIME STEINBERG, *La Persécution des Juifs en Belgique (1940-1945)*, Bruxelles, 2004.

261. INSA MEINEN, *La Shoah en Belgique*, Waterloo, 2012.

262. SYLVAIN BRACHFELD, *Ils ont survécu: le sauvetage des Juifs en Belgique occupée*, Bruxelles, 2001; BARBARA DICKSCHEN, *L'école en sursis: la scolarisation des enfants juifs pendant la guerre*, Bruxelles, 2006; HANNE HELEMANNS, *Schimmen met een ster: het bewogen verhaal van joodse ondergedoken kinderen tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog in België*, Antwerpen, 2007; VEERLE VANDEN DAELEN, *Laten we hun lied verder zingen: de heropbouw van de joodse gemeenschap in Antwerpen na de Tweede Wereldoorlog (1944-1960)*, Amsterdam, 2008; BOB MOORE, *Survivors: Jewish Self-Help and Rescue in Nazi-Occupied Western Europe*, Oxford, 2010; LAURENCE SCHIRAM, *Dossin: Wachtkamer van Auschwitz*, Brussel, 2018; SUZANNE VROMEN, *Hidden children of the Holocaust: Belgian nuns and their daring rescue of young Jews from the nazis*, Oxford, New York, 2008.

263. LUIS ANGEL BERNARDO Y GARCIA, *Le Ventre des Belges (...)*, p. 57-59.

264. DIRK LUYTEN, *Ideologie en praktijk van het corporatisme tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog in België*, Brussel, 1997.

265. RIK HEMMERIJCKX, *Van Verzet tot Koude Oorlog, 1940-1949: machtsstrijd om het ABVV*, Bruxelles/Gand, 2003.

266. LUIS ANGEL BERNARDO Y GARCIA, *Le Ventre des Belges (...)*.

267. JEAN-FRANÇOIS CROMBOIS, *Camille Gutt: les finances et la guerre, 1940-1945*, Bruxelles, 1999; HERMAN VAN DER WEE and MONIQUE VERBREYT, *A Small Nation in the Turmoil of the Second World War: Money, Finance and Occupation (Belgium, its Enemies, its Friends, 1939-1945)*, Leuven, 2009.

The history of culture and propaganda under occupation gained some traction by the end of the 1990s. Some essential works were the book from Virginie Devillez (ULB) and the PhD research of Marnix Beyen (KU Leuven, later Antwerp) about dealing with history and the past in Belgium and the Netherlands²⁶⁸. Roel Vande Winkel and Daniel Biltereyst published a book about Flemish film propaganda and Bruno Benvindo published a book about Belgian filmmaker Henri Storck²⁶⁹. Céline Rase published her PhD study about the collaborating 'Radio Brussels' and, among others, Dirk De Geest and Paul Aron studied literature and writers²⁷⁰. Peter Schrijvers became one of the most important historians of the liberation, often with a focus on the role of the allied forces²⁷¹. In 2012, Martin Conway published an essential book about the first post-war years in Belgium with a strong focus on the impact of the Royal Affair on the longer-term disintegration of the Belgian state²⁷².

Other topics remained less systematically researched. Although in 2004 Luc De Vos published a general view on Belgian military history

during WWII, military history in general fell out of vogue²⁷³. The politics of the lesser evil of Belgian administration received an (unpublished) report by Bénédicte Rochet and a synthesis work by Nico Wouters, as well as a book on mayors²⁷⁴. CegeSoma published a volume about the Catholic Church under occupation in 1999 but religious history was not a large field²⁷⁵. Conway and Gotovitch edited a volume about exile governments under occupation²⁷⁶. The Belgian Congo in general received more historiographical attention after 2010, but mostly not specifically related to WWII²⁷⁷.

The history of the German occupier remained under-researched and, when it received attention, it was often through the lens of German repression, such as the works of Etienne Verhoeyen, Marc Verschooris, or Patrick Nefors on the concentration camp of Breendonk²⁷⁸. For a long time, the Eastern Cantons were a research-gap as well, but the work by Carlo Lejeune and Christophe Brüll, among others, gave more attention to this part of Belgium²⁷⁹.

268. VIRGINIE DEVILLEZ, *Le retour à l'ordre. Art et Politique en Belgique, 1918-1945*, Bruxelles, 2003; MARNIX BEYEN, *Oorlog en Verleden*. See also for example: MARNIX BEYEN, "Wetenschap, politiek, nationaal-socialisme. De cultuurpolitiek van het Duits militair bezettingsbestuur in België, 1940-1944" in, *BEG/CHTP*, 2003, Nr. 11, p. 47-70.

269. BRUNO BENVINDO, *Henri Storck, le cinéma belge et l'Occupation*, Bruxelles, 2010; ROEL VANDE WINKEL en DANIEL BILTEREYST, *Filmen voor Vlaanderen: Vlaamse Beweging, propaganda en film*, Antwerpen, 2008.

270. DIRK DE GEEST, PAUL ARON en DIRK MARTIN (eds.), *Hun kleine oorlog. De invloed van de tweede wereldoorlog op het literaire leven in België*, Leuven/Brussel, 1998; CÉLINE RASE, *Les ondes en uniforme: la propagande de Radio Bruxelles en Belgique occupée (1940-1944)*, Namur, 2011.

271. Among others: PETER SCHRIJVERS, *Liberators: the Allies and Belgian Society, 1944-1945*, Cambridge, 2009.

272. MARTIN CONWAY, *The Sorrows of Belgium: Liberation and Political Reconstruction, 1944-1947*, Oxford, 2012.

273. LUC DE VOS, *La Belgique et la Seconde Guerre mondiale*, Bruxelles, 2004.

274. BÉNÉDICTE ROCHET, *L'administration belge pendant la Deuxième Guerre mondiale: refuge et berceau de modernisation*, Bruxelles, 2002; NICO WOUTERS, *De Führerstaat. Overheid en collaboratie in België (1940-1944)*, Tielt, 2006; idem, Mayoral See also: DIRK LUYTEN, 'Administration centrale de l'État belge', in JOSÉ GOTOVITCH and PAUL ARON (eds.), *Dictionnaire de la Seconde Guerre mondiale en Belgique*, Bruxelles, 2008, p. 14-19.

275. FABRICE MAERTEN, FRANS SELLESLAGH, MARK VAN DEN WIJNGAERT, (eds.), *Entre la peste et le choléra. Vie et attitudes des catholiques sous l'occupation*, Bruxelles/Gerpennes, 1999.

276. MARTIN CONWAY and JOSÉ GOTOVITCH (eds.), *Europe in Exile: European Exile Communities in Britain, 1940-1945*, New York/Oxford, 2001.

277. G. HULSTAERT, 'Herinneringen aan de oorlog', *Belgisch-Congo tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, Brussel, 1983; GUY VANTHEMSCHÉ, *Belgium and the Congo, 1885-1960*, New York, 2012; FLORENCE GILLET, "Et le Congo entre en guerre", in CHRISTINE LAURENT, *40-45: La Belgique en guerre*, Bruxelles, 2015, p. 92-96.

278. ETIENNE VERHOEYEN, *Spionnen aan de achterdeur: de Duitse Abwehr in België 1936-1945*, Antwerpen/Appeldoorn, 2011; MARC VERSCHOORIS, *Hoe zwart in het donker gedijt: De Sicherheitsdienst en de Sicherheitspolizei Gent-Leeuwarden 1940-1945*, Leuven, 2016; PATRICK NEFORS, *Breendonk, 1940-1945: de geschiedenis*, Antwerpen, 2004.

279. CHRISTOPH BRÜLL, "L'identité des Belges germanophones est une non-identité". Quelques réflexions à propos de publications récentes sur l'histoire de la Communauté germanophone de Belgique, in *JBH*, 2009, 21, p. 211-226.

Even after the 1990s, general synthesis works remained few and far between. In Dutch, the edited volume by Mark Van den Wijngaert from 2004, with several authors tackling thematic chapters, became the new main synthesis work²⁸⁰. In French-speaking Belgium, another approach was chosen in 2008 with an encyclopedia of WWII, something which does not exist in Flanders (although the *New Encyclopedia of the Flemish Movement* of 1998 contains many articles about 'collaboration' and 'post-war purges')²⁸¹. A popularized short synthesis of Belgium's occupation history was published in 2015 (in both French and Dutch) while the book published in 2019 by the War Heritage Institute (that accompanies its new WWII exhibition) will probably become the most general (popular) occupation synthesis for years to come²⁸². The latter books were edited volumes with many different authors.

Memory Studies and micro-histories

In the same way the Holocaust had become a dominant theme after the 1980s, commemorations and collective public memories became a dominant scholarly topic after 1995²⁸³. A homogeneous sub-field of 'memory studies' in Belgian WWII historiography did not develop; however, memories were researched in great variety of approaches.

One important strand of memory-related research focussed on the study of the social construction of memories in post-war Belgium (politics of mem-

ory and socio-cultural processes, dominant narratives, and memory communities). Pieter Lagrou's (ULB) published PhD 'Legacy of Nazi Occupation' was probably the most influential scholarly work on national and patriotic WWII-memories²⁸⁴. Lagrou studied the memorial legacy of resistance fighters, deported labourers and victims of Nazi persecution in Belgium, the Netherlands and France. A lot of attention was also given to the political process surrounding the amnesty debate²⁸⁵. Another influential yet distinct PhD study was Beyen's *Oorlog en verleden* (KU Leuven, now Antwerp). Beyen researched the politics of history as well as the agency of professional historians and archivists between 1938 and 1947 in Belgium and the Netherlands²⁸⁶.

A further important strand was connected to the study of nations and nationalism. The historic study of the Flemish Movement and Flemish nationalism had overlapped with WWII-studies from the start. By the 1980s, it became a well-established scholarly field. The gradual increase in academic quality of the journal *Wetenschappelijke Tijdingen* (the main journal on the history of the Flemish Movement and Flemish nationalism since 2016's *Tijdschrift over de Geschiedenis van de Vlaamse Beweging*) serves as an important indicator of this²⁸⁷. During the 1990s, the formerly 'oppositional' fields of research grew more closely together, partly under the umbrella of the CWWII (later CegeSoma). Exemplary in this regard was Frank Seberechts. His 1994 book *Ieder zijn zwarte* (about post-war purges and, in particular, also the

280. MARK VAN DEN WIJNGAERT, *België tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, Antwerpen, 2004. (with a slightly revised re-edition in 2015).

281. PAUL ARON and JOSÉ GOTOVITCH (eds.), *Dictionnaire (...)*; *Nieuwe Encyclopedie van de Vlaamse Beweging*, Tielt, 1998, 3 vol.

282. BRUNO DE WEYER, HELEN GREYERS, RUDI VAN DOORSLAER and JAN JULIA ZURNÉ (eds.), *België 40-45*, Roeselare, 2015; CHRISTINE LAURENT, *40-45 : La Belgique en guerre*, BRUXELLES, 2015; WANNES DEVOS and KEVIN GONY (eds.), *Oorlog. Bezetting. Bevrijding. België 1940-1945*, Tielt, 2019.

283. SONJA VAN 'T HOF, "A Kaleidoscope of Victimhood: Belgian Experiences of World War II", in JOLANDE WITHUIS & ANNET MOOIJ, *The Politics of War Trauma. The aftermath of World War II in eleven European countries*, Amsterdam, 2010, p. 76-77.

284. PIETER LAGROU, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945-1965*, Cambridge, 2000.

285. JOSÉ GOTOVITCH and CHANTAL KESTELOOT, "Amnestie, het onmogelijke compromis", in *Ibidem*, *Het gewicht van het oorlogsverleden*, Gent, 2002, p. 149-170.

286. MARNIX BEYEN, *Oorlog en verleden: nationale geschiedenis in België en Nederland, 1938-1947*, Amsterdam, 2002.

287. See the page of the journal: <http://www.wt.be/index.php/wt>.

'popular vengeance' against collaborators) was an influential book that despite its sound empirical basis, was very influential in selling the dominant myth of the Belgian anti-Flemish repression and Flemish 'culture of trauma'²⁸⁸. But, in a 2019 interview about his new book (about war crimes committed by Flemish Eastern-Front volunteers), Seberechts himself openly admitted that he would now radically alter the 'apologetic tone' of his 1994 book, indicating his personal evolution within the larger field²⁸⁹.

A prime example of how nationalism-studies and WWII studies converged is Chantal Kesteloot, a French-speaking researcher who did her PhD research on the Walloon movement, focussing on Belgian national identity. She analysed how the legacy of the resistance had been used by a dominant leftist current in French-speaking Belgium to construct a specific Walloon identity in Belgium after 1945²⁹⁰. In doing so, she brought theories of nationalism-studies to the critical field of WWII. Kesteloot would become one of Belgium's leading historians of the study of public memories related to WWII. She was essential in the study of heritage, monuments and commemorative sites related to WWII, often with a focus on the city of Brussels²⁹¹.

A seminal work regarding this theme is the book by Bruno Benvindo and Evert Peeters on national sites of memory in Belgium²⁹². Not only did both historians connect the memorial legacies of both

World Wars in Belgium, they also gave one of the most well-thought out analyses of the politics of memory in Belgium after 1945. A follow-up to this book was a thematic issue of the *Journal of Belgian History* in 2012, in which Benvindo and Peeters as editors further developed their analysis of the 'delegating logic' of Belgium's history and memory politics. They also pleaded to 'rehistorize' the study of the memories of WWII in Belgium²⁹³. With regard to the latter, we could also mention the field of oral history as one of the related strands and, in particular, the Aerts-Wouters thematic issue of 2014²⁹⁴.

Memory studies of WWII became increasingly connected to the analysis of the gradual disintegration of the unitary Belgian state. The legacy of both World Wars had always been part and parcel of public debates about the Belgian nation²⁹⁵. The different views on collaboration and resistance in both parts of the country were the recurring theme²⁹⁶. A specific point of interest in this regard was the so-called 'failure' of resistance-memories in Flanders (as opposed to in Wallonia)²⁹⁷.

The latter issue poses the more general question of the relationship between historical research and public memories. Purely regarding the number of output, the resistance has consistently been (and remains) one of the strongest WWII-related subjects – much more so than collaboration, for example. There was, however, a clear language-gap. The bibliography on the resistance

288. FRANK SEBERECHTS, *Ieder zijn zwarte : verzet, collaboratie en repressie*, Leuven, 1994.

289. In the interview "De Vlamingen wisten dat de Duitsers in het Oosten de Joden systematisch uitmoordden", in *De Morgen*, 30 January 2019. FRANK SEBERECHTS, *Drang naar het oosten*, Antwerpen, 2019.

290. CHANTAL KESTELOOT, *La Résistance, ciment (...)*.

291. LAURENCE VAN YPERSELE, EMMANUEL DEBRUYNE et CHANTAL KESTELOOT, *Bruxelles, la mémoire et la guerre (1914-2014)*, Waterloo, 2014.

292. BRUNO BENVINDO and EVERT PEETERS, *Les décombres de la guerre : mémoires belges en conflit, 1945-2010*, Waterloo, 2012.

293. BRUNO BENVINDO and EVERT PEETERS, *La mémoire (...)*.

294. NICO WOUTERS & KOEN AERTS (eds.), *Mondelinge geschiedenis in België en de (de-) constructie van collectieve herinnering*, BTFC, 92 nr. 2, 2014.

295. MARTIN CONWAY, *The End(s) of Memory*, p. 173.

296. CHANTAL KESTELOOT and BRUNO DE WEVER, "When was the End of Belgium? Explanations from the Past", in JBH, XLII, 2012, 4, p. 218-235.

297. KOEN AERTS and BRUNO DE WEVER, "Het verzet in de publieke herinnering in Vlaanderen", in BTNG/RBHC/JBH, 2012, 2/3, p. 78-107.



Pieter Lagrou (left), Bruno Benvindo (middle) and Evert Peeters during the CegeSoma conference on War Memories on 29 October 2010. The issue of Belgium's 'fragmented memories' became an essential focus for WWII-related research during the 1990s. Benvindo and Peeters would edit the 2012 thematic issue of the Journal of Belgian History on WWII-Memories in Belgium (Source : CegeSoma).

in Flanders (which includes works until 2004) holds 485 works in Dutch and 937 in French. The majority of research on the resistance in Belgium is therefore in French. This is even further underscored by the fact that several of the main Dutch works in this bibliography, are in fact about the (negative) role of the resistance in post-war purges.

This is probably one of the elements that helps to explain the 'weakness' of the resistance memory in Flanders. Flemish historians were more focussed on deconstructing myths about collaboration. Nevertheless, the exact relationship between scholarly research and evolutions in (dominant) public memories remains quite a complex domain.

Overall, a positive result of memory studies was the influx of more theoretical reflection in a field that was often still dominated by empirical, even descriptive-minded, scholars. Another positive consequence was the widening of the chronological frame. It partly overlapped with growing attention to the history of 'ordinary people': the history of local communities and families, of the non-elite. Indeed, another trend – important since the 1980s but increasingly growing in popularity after 1995 – was micro-history in a general sense. The online bibliography about Belgium indicates that no less than ca. 60% of all publications related to WWII in Belgium (between 2009-2017) had a micro-angle in the larger sense of the word (local histories, an individual life-story or account, or specific case-studies)²⁹⁸. The most popular themes in these micro-studies were the study of a village under occupation,

the liberation (military history), German repression, deportation, resistance and food supply.

Micro-approaches lend themselves well to larger public books. CegeSoma for example, published a series of photo-books under the 'cities at war' umbrella²⁹⁹. Another remark is that comparisons between WWI and WWII – which remained rare exceptions – were mostly attempted through micro-approaches. In his PhD, Benoit Majérus studied the Brussels police during both World Wars³⁰⁰. Another study on post-war purges after both World Wars took the city of Mons as its case³⁰¹. A further remark in this regard is the slow rise of consciously emotional history: the evocation of personal voices, the use of narrative techniques and the bending of genres. Here, Belgian historiography was particularly slow and conservative. Herman Van Goethem's book '*1942, het jaar van de stilte*' (The Year of Silence), published in 2019, is probably a milestone in this regard³⁰². The book did not necessarily add fundamental changes to our existing knowledge about the Jewish persecutions in the city of Antwerp; yet, its uniquely evocative style created unprecedented public attention. Its success, without a doubt, will create many followers in the coming years.

The biography has never been a favoured genre in WWII studies. Large biographical works remain mostly reserved for either the main national politicians (members of government) or (Flemish) collaborators. In an early stage (1960s-1970s), some biographical work was conducted related to the role of the government during the occupa-

298. See: <http://biblio.arch.be/webopac/vubis.csp?Profile=BHBBGB> (consulted 21 December 2018). This bibliography includes publications published in 2009.

299. CHANTAL KESTELOOT, *Bruxelles sous l'Occupation 1940-1944*, Bruxelles, 2009; DIRK MARTIN en LIEVEN SAERENS, *Antwerpen 1940-1945*, Antwerpen/Brussel, 2010; FABRICE MAERTEN et ALAIN COLIGNON, *La Wallonie sous l'Occupation 1940-1945*, Bruxelles/Waterloo, 2012.

300. BENOIT MAJÉRUS, *Occupations et logiques policières: la police bruxelloise en 1914-1918 et 1940-1945*, Bruxelles, 2007.

301. AMANDINE DUMONT and AMANDINE THIRY (eds.), *Mons dans la tourmente: justice et société à l'épreuve des guerres mondiales (1914-1961)*, Louvain-la-Neuve, 2016.

302. HERMAN VAN GOETHEM, *1942. Het jaar van de stilte*, Kalmthout, 2019.

tion and war³⁰³. The biographical approach was fairly strong in Flemish-nationalist historiography. Evrard Raskin wrote a biography of Gerard Romsée, the collaborating secretary-general of the Interior during the occupation³⁰⁴. In the 1960s-1980s Arthur De Bruyne sustained a remarkable effort in biographical writings about Flemish nationalist collaborators, a torch that was afterwards taken over by historian Pieter-Jan Verstraete³⁰⁵. The works of De Bruyne and Verstraete were highly apologetic towards their subject matter and, as such, separated from mainstream historiography. For the rest, biographies seemed reserved for larger-than-life individuals such as Hendrik De Man or Léon Degrelle³⁰⁶.

Micro-research also developed as a favoured approach of researchers working outside of academia, writing the history of their community or their family. This group – often people with university diplomas – has grown substantially in recent decades. It is my impression that these researchers favour the traditional themes of collaboration and resistance. One recent emblematic example is the 2015 book by Herman Portocarero, a Belgian diplomat writing his family history of collaboration during two successive German occupations³⁰⁷. Another example of a resistance-angle is the Dutch book by Paul De Jongh about the resistance in a local abbey and the French book about the resistance in Watermael-Boitsfort³⁰⁸.

Was there still a national WWII-historiography?

The existence of different language communities has always been a particular challenge for scholars publishing about Belgian WWII-history. As early as June 1968, the Flemish nationalist member of Parliament, Maurits Coppieters, asked the minister whether the newly created centre had three separate departments for each language community, seeing as they “without a doubt will have their own specific approach to the history of the Second World War”³⁰⁹. Although WWII was a quintessential national topic, reaching a ‘national’ audience would almost certainly mean translating content from one language to the other. Indeed, in 1970, the CWWII simply decided to publish its first scholarly journal in its entirety in French and Dutch. This effectively meant translating the entire scholarly content. The centre was able to sustain this impossible endeavour until 1985. But even in the 1970s, publications were mostly produced in one language exclusively (*l’An 40* and *Hitler en het politieke lot van België* for example were never translated).

With the gradual division of one Belgian society – of the academic landscape, the media, the world of commercial publishers, and not to mention the decreased knowledge about the other national language – less Belgians would actually read books,

303. HENRI-FRANÇOIS VAN AAL and JOSÉ GOTOVITCH, *Télé-mémoires: De Vleeschauwer, Gutt, Spaak*, Bruxelles, 1971; JACQUES WILLEQUET, *Paul-Henri Spaak: un homme, des combats*, Bruxelles, 1975. For later examples: PIERRE VAN DEN DUNGEN, *Hubert Pierlot (1883-1963): la Loi, le Roi, la Liberté*, Bruxelles, 2010; JEAN STENGERS, “Hubert Pierlot, le 28 mai 1940”, in Idem, *Léopold III et le gouvernement. Les deux politiques belges de 1940*, Bruxelles, 2002; VINCENT DUJARDIN and MICHEL DUMOULIN, *Paul van Zeeland, 1893-1973*, Bruxelles, 1997.

304. EVRARD RASKIN, *Gerard Romsée: een ongewone man, een ongewoon leven*, Antwerpen, Baarn, 1995.

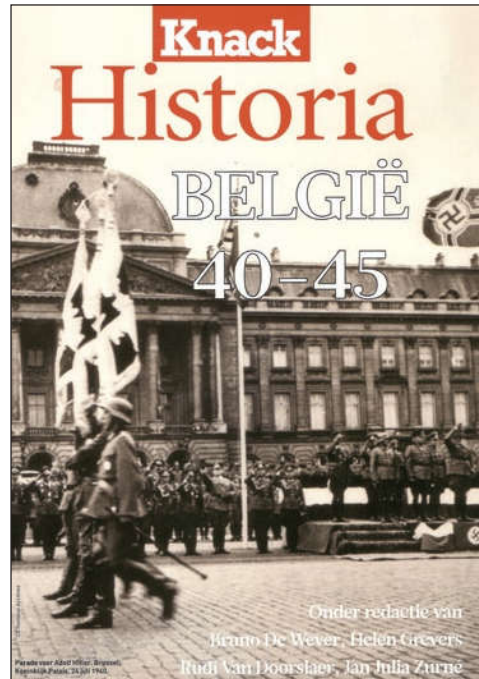
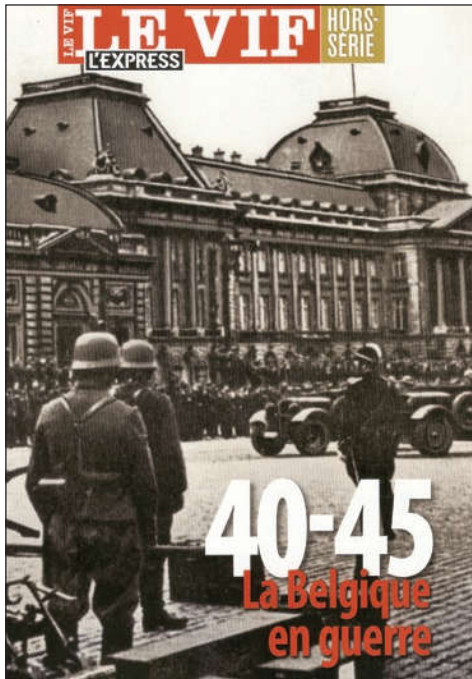
305. Among others: ARTHUR DE BRUYNE, *Joris Van Severen: droom en daad*, Zulte, 1961; Idem, *Trouw: Pater Stracke, Borms, Staf De Clercq, Leuridan, Tollenaere, Wim Maes, De Panne*, 1973; Idem, “Strijdbare Vlaming”, in ERIK VERSTRAETE (ed.), *Wies Moens, 1898-1982: gedenkboek*, Antwerpen, 1984, p. 171-193; PIETER JAN VERSTRAETE, *Reimond Tollenaere: biografie*, Kortrijk, 1996; Idem, *Hendrik Jozef Elias: biografie*, Kortrijk, 2005; Idem, *Leo Vindevogel: biografie*, Kortrijk, 2013.

306. BRUNO CHEYNS, *Léon Degrelle: De Führer uit Bouillon: Biografie*, Antwerpen, 2017; JAN WILLEM STUTE, *Hendrik de Man: Een man met een plan: Biografie*, Kalmthout, 2018.

307. HERMAN PORTOCARERO, *Collaboratie, fortuin en ondergang: familiechroniek 1914-1945*, Leuven, 2015.

308. PAUL DE JONGH, *Grenzeloos verzet: Over spionerende monniken, ontsnappingslijnen en het Hannibalspiel 1940-1943*, Turnhout, 2018; ANDRÉ DARTÉVELLE, *Un maquis dans les cités: la Résistance à Watermael-Boitsfort, 1940-1945*, Waterloo, 2018; BERT CORNELIS, *De zaak van de zwarten: een kasteelgijzeling uit de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, Antwerpen/Leuven, 2018.

309. KOEN AERTS, *Repressie zonder maat (...)*.



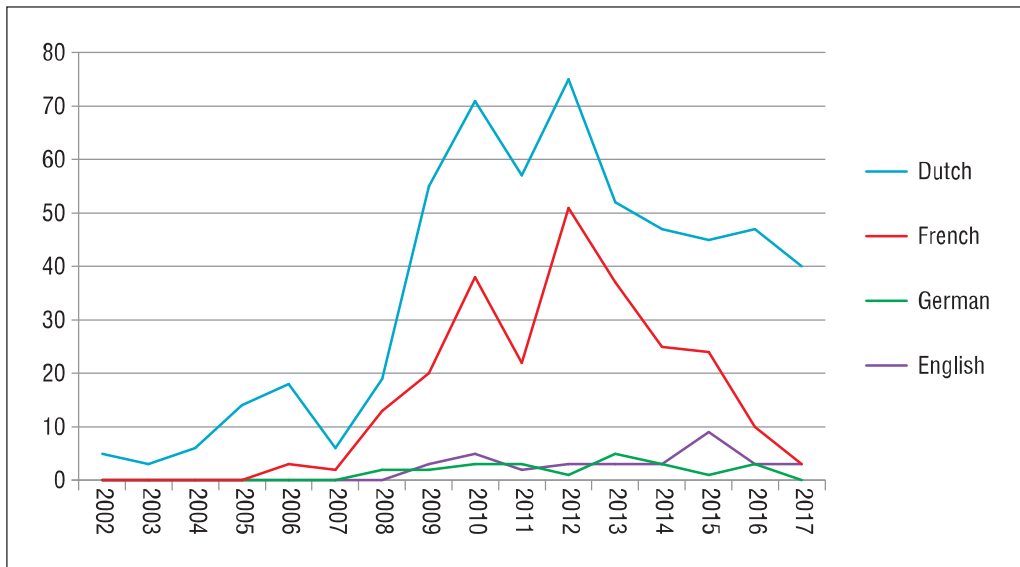
The challenges of writing national history in a federal, multi-lingual country. In 2015, it proved impossible to publish a singular version of this public history synthesis of WWII-history. Two versions were published in French and Dutch, with partly different authors and varying content.



Some of the editors of the source- and research-guide *Was Opa een Nazi? – Papy était-il un Nazi?* in 2017 in the conference room of CegeSoma. The idea for this publication came from Koen Aerts, but ultimately implicated the State Archives in a bilingual project. From left to right : Bart Willems (State Archives), Pieter Lagrou (ULB), Lawrence Van Haecke (at that time Breendonck), Koen Aerts (UGent), Paul Drossens (State Archives) and Jonas Campion (UCL) (Source : CegeSoma).



Karel Velle, general director of the State Archives in Belgium, during the press-conference for the launch of the source- and research-guide *Was Opa een Nazi? – Papy était-il un Nazi?* in the conference room of CegeSoma (2017). The latter became part of the State Archives in Belgium in 2016, maintaining its core mission. (Source : CegeSoma).



Language WWII publications 2002-2017

visit exhibitions or watch documentaries about national history in the other national language. As a bilingual national centre, CegeSoma has continued the effort to target one national audience until this day, including efforts to produce the same output in both Dutch and French³¹⁰. This remains sometimes difficult to put into practice, as exemplified by the failed attempt to create one popularising synthesis in 2015³¹¹. Often, the true obstacles are quite banal: finding funding for translations and working through two different publishers, for example. In 2016 another essential book succeeded where the 2015 popular synthesis had failed. *Papy était-il un Nazi?/Was Opa een Nazi*

(‘Was Grandfather a Nazi?’) was a research guide on collaboration and post-war purges published simultaneously in Dutch and French (an explicit objective of the project). Both language-editions of the same book were presented in September 2017 in CegeSoma³¹². Also noteworthy was the launch of the website ‘Belgium WWII’, which presents content in the three national languages³¹³.

A closely related question was whether one national scholarly community still existed. As early as 1976, José Gotovitch had already warned of a separation of sorts³¹⁴. As previously mentioned, Belgium steered clear from any ‘history wars’;

310. Some examples: *De curatoren van het getto* or *Les curateurs du ghetto* from 2004 by editors VAN DOORSLAER and SCHREIBER; *Gewillig België* or *La Belgique docile* from 2007 by DE BRUYNE, SEBERECHTS, VAN DOORSLAER and WOUTERS; Flore PLISNIER, *Ils ont pris les armes pour Hitler*, Bruxelles, 2008 and Idem, *Te wapen voor Hitler: gewapende collaboratie in franstalig België 1940-1944*, Amsterdam, Antwerpen/Brussel, 2008; *Décombres de la guerre/Scherven van de oorlog* in 2012 by PEETERS and BENVINDO; EMMANUEL GERARD, WIDUKIND DE RIDDER and FRANÇOISE MULLER, *Wie heeft Lahaut vermoord? De geheime koude oorlog in België*, Brussel/Leuven, 2015; Idem, *Qui a tué Julien Lahaut? Les ombres de la guerre froide en Belgique*, Bruxelles/Waterloo, 2015.

311. A Dutch language publication published in 2015 could not be reproduced in French; the latter was published with an adapted roster of authors and therefore content. BRUNO DE WEVER, HELEN GREVERS, RUDI VAN DOORSLAER and JAN JULIA ZURNÉ (eds.), *België 40-45*, Roeselare, 2015; CHRISTINE LAURENT, 40-45: *La Belgique en guerre*, Bruxelles, 2015.

312. KOEN AERTS, DIRK LUYTEN, BART WILLEMS, PAUL DROSSEN en PIETER LAGROU (eds.), *Was Opa een nazi? Speuren naar het oorlogsverleden*, Tiel, 2017; Ibidem, *Papy était-il un nazi? Sur les traces d'un passé de guerre*, Bruxelles, 2017.

313. www.belgiumwwii.be.

314. JOSÉ GOTOVITCH, “Wallons et Flamands: le fossé se creuse”, in *La Wallonie*, Bruxelles, 1976, p. 295-317.

but the different scholarly language communities inevitably developed different foci and accents. For example, Flemish historians after the 1980s in general developed a trend towards deconstructing the Flemish nation, while French-speaking historians in general were more supportive for the construction of a Walloon nation-identity. As we have seen, around 2001 historians tried to underscore the general political trend of reconciliation by pointing to the existence of a national scholarly consensus or, at the very least, a national community of Flemish and Francophone scholars³¹⁵.

An interesting point of discussion remains as to how this divided scholarly landscape has (not) impacted the outcome of particular research. As a concrete example, I would like to point to the work on Eastern-Front volunteers. French-speaking historian Flore Plisnier, in her work on French-speaking military collaborators, clearly favours a social prism in which political or psychological factors are largely absent. This is perfectly in-line with a dominant Francophone narrative on (military) collaborationists as socially deviant men or criminals born out of material deprivation. In contrast, Flemish historians Aline Sax and Frank Seberechts favour taking an ideological approach to the group of Flemish military collaborators (Flemish nationalism, anti-Communist Catholicism, national-socialism)³¹⁶. In her book, Sax concluded that sixty-four percent of her group of Flemish military collaborators were predominantly driven by ideological motives. Are these radically different dominant outcomes to be explained by true historical differences between

Flanders and Wallonia, or by different methodologies, sources or sensibilities (or a combination)?

It raises the question on internationalization as well. Systematically calculating and analysing the rise of international publications about Belgian WWII-history is beyond the scope of this article. In general, we can hypothesize that English-language international publications gradually rise after 1995 as international funding and publication outlets rose as well³¹⁷. Belgian scholars were active in larger European research networks, from the INSFO project (2000-2004) to the ongoing EHRI-project (2015)³¹⁸. However – as the language graphic seems to confirm – the field of WWII-studies in Belgium remains, to this day, predominantly driven by a community, a set of questions and a methodological and archival tradition steeped in a *national* research-culture. This sharply contrasts the study of WWI in Belgium, where recent historical research during the centenary (2014-2018) has confirmed a much more international and transnational scope.

V. Conclusive Observations

During the last four decades, output increased and diversified. In terms of output, WWII-research is a thriving field. This increase was caused by a (digital) democratization of knowledge-production, the centrality of WWII-related public memories in Belgian society and the effort by the State Archives

315. JOSÉ GOTOVITCH and CHANTAL KESTELOOT (eds.), *Het gewicht van het oorlogsverleden*, Gent, 2002; Ibidem, *Collaboration, répression : un passé qui résiste*, Bruxelles, 2002.

316. FLORE PLISNIER, *Te Wapen* p. 74; FRANK SEBERECHTS, *Tussen Schelde*, p. 73 and 181; ALINE SAX, *Voor Vlaanderen*, p. 160-163.

317. These can be either Belgian historians editing thematic volumes or writing a national Belgian case study. An example of the first type: PAUL BRASSLEY, YVES SEGERS and LEEN VAN MOLLE, *War, Agriculture, and Food : Rural Europe from the 1930s to the 1950s*, New York/London, 2012. An example of the second type: DIRK LUYTEN, "Corporatist Institutions and Economic Collaboration in Occupied Belgium", in HANS OTTO FROLAND (et.al. eds.), *Industrial Collaboration in Nazi-Occupied Europe : Norway in Context*, London, 2016, p. 211-242.

318. INSFO or the Impact of National Socialist and Fascist Rule in Europe funded by the European Science Foundation and EHRI or the European Holocaust Research Network funded under the European H2020 programme.



Pierre-Alain Tallier (State Archives) giving the conclusions of the conference on WWII-sources on 25 February 2010. The slide shows the German occupier loading archives in a car with the title 'België 1940 : Wegname van Archief' (Belgium 1940: theft of archives). (Source : State Archives in Belgium).

to gradually repair the problematic legacy of dispersed WWII-records³¹⁹.

An initial remark must indeed acknowledge the archives. Belgium lacked a policy to safeguard public WWII-archives for decades. And for decades afterwards access to essential archival collections remained difficult. The main impact on historical research was clearly one of delay. Belgian WWII-researchers found ways around this through creative combinations of alternative sources, or even by creating sources themselves (particularly through interviews). Given the problematic archival situation, it is remarkable how quickly the field took off in the 1970s and 1980s. Nevertheless, it has had a lasting impact to this day. This 'fragmented foundation' has perpetuated certain research gaps. The study of the occupation economy is one example. Although not impossible, this research is simply harder to do than in other countries where centrally disclosed archives exist. One could argue that the field of WWII-historiography itself came to mirror the archival fragmentation. There was not necessarily a one-on-one correlation between the disclosure of large archival collections and subsequent research progress. Research advanced in steps that were dispersed over a longer period of time, not to mention the language division. Research that was partly done was picked up again many years later in disconnected research. This makes it difficult to explain why certain themes or focal points disappear or re-appear. In 2010, Pierre-Alain Tallier of the State Archives calculated that 11 % of all archives preserved in the State Archives was related to WWII (this was 13 % in contemporary archives between 1794-2010). And this was even before the transfer of the military justice archives. However, he also remarked that, of those WWII-related archives, 75 % had been acquired by the State Archives after the year 2000. The latter only seems to imply that the current increase of research is merely the beginning.

A second remark relates to the historians themselves. Belgium did, of course, have institutional research planning, but the main monographs that created true jumps forward often came from individual researchers starting from a position as relative outsiders. Gotovitch and De Jonghe published their landmark books outside of the CWWII; the breakthrough in collaboration research was created by the TV-series of De Wilde, the only true synthetic monograph about occupied Belgium was written by Verhoeyen who was a moral philosopher and started as a volunteer for the BRT, Steinberg was an outsider in the mainstream Jewish community when he almost singlehandedly launched Belgian Holocaust studies, Huyse produced *'Onverwerkt Verleden'* from an outsider's perspective of the topic, the first monograph about Rex was written by a British historian, De Wever came from the periphery environment he was studying, Velaers and Van Goethem published their book on Leopold III as an accidental spinoff of another project. These historians were able to integrate themselves in an institutional framework, but only after their individual agency had already predominated the final result. Arguably, this might also help explain the high level of academic consensus in Belgium after the 1980s. That few outsiders could topple academic consensus might partly be explained by the fact that most successful outsiders were 'institutionalized' before they could do so. One could ask how far this represents a Belgian academic culture of *Einzelgänger*s and individualists. But it is also simply a question of scale: the Belgian scholarly community is very small, and everybody knows everyone. The role of CegeSoma should not be underestimated. Perhaps its single greatest achievement after 1969 was the creation of a national community of WWII-scholars that closely cooperated across ideological-, institutional-, age-, language- and methodological barriers.

A final remark concerns the ambiguous relationship between history and, an often ill-defined,

319. DIRK MARTIN, "De Tweede Wereldoorlog", in PATRICIA VAN DEN EECKHOUT en GUY VANTHEMSCHE (eds.) *Bronnen voor de studie van het hedendaagse België, 19^e – 21^e eeuw*, Brussel, 2017, p. 805-823; PIERRE-ALAIN TALLIER, "Quelques initiatives en matière d'ouverture à la recherche et d'accessibilité des archives de la Seconde Guerre mondiale aux Archives de l'État", in *Ibidem*, *In de nasleep (...)*, p. 151-157.

public memory. After the apex of the public WWII-historian in 1971-1995, the latter quickly lost its position as central gatekeeper of history. Other cultural actors, other scientific disciplines, other modes of knowledge dissemination and other memorial logics took over. This presented the field of WWII-studies with both opportunities and challenges. It helped to shake up a field of WWII-studies that around 1995 was somewhat entrenched in its own traditional themes (collaboration, resistance, post-war purges, Holocaust), in its rigid chronology (1940-1945), in its own traditional approaches (organisational history of structures), and in its own Belgian focus. The 'memory boom' helped to open up larger chronological timeframes and to create more interdisciplinary approaches, to generate more attention to gender and subaltern groups, to explore micro-history and hybrid forms of cultural-social-political history, and it likely helped to increase the internationalization of Belgian WWII-research. How-

ever, public memory also pushed fundamental historical research aside. After 1995, the history of WWII was re-politicized in a symbiosis between state sponsored history policies and a commercial media logic. The centrality of public memory impacted research agendas, such as funding selections of topics and questions. Overall, the public impact of critical historical research that disrupted a pre-existing dominant consensus was severely diminished. Today, WWII research confirms far more than it disrupts. Paradoxically, despite the quantitative increase in output, enormous research gaps remain: the histories of the major political parties, the history of the state, of the Belgian Congo, the history of forced labour, of prisoners of war, of certain social classes and of aspects of daily life. The purely economic history of the occupation, the study of the German occupier and even the resistance still lack works comparable to the ones published between the 'golden years' of 1991-1995.

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Abbreviations

BRTN:	Belgische Radio en Televisie Omroep (Nederlands)
BTNG/RBHC/JBH:	Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis/Revue Belge d'Histoire Contemporaine/ Journal of Belgian History
BTFG/RBPH:	Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Filologie en Geschiedenis/Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire
CHSGM/BGTWO:	Cahiers d'Histoire de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale - Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis van de Tweede Wereldoorlog
CHTP-BEG:	Cahiers d'Histoire du Temps Présent (30/60) - Bijdragen tot de Eigentijdse Geschiedenis (30/60)
CWWII:	Research and Study Centre for the History of the Second World War in Belgium
KUL:	Katholieke Universiteit Leuven
KMS:	Koninklijke Militaire School (Royal Military Academy)
MB/BS:	Moniteur Belge/Belgisch Staatsblad
RTBF:	Radio et Télévision Belge Francophone
RUG:	Rijksuniversiteit Gent (currently: University of Ghent)
UCL:	Université Catholique de Louvain
ULB:	Université Libre de Bruxelles
ULg:	Université de Liège
VUB:	Vrije Universiteit Brussel