

PHD RESEARCH

A short overview of recent PhD research on Belgian modern and contemporary history

KASPAR BEELEN

Between “I” and “We”: Self-representations in parliamentary discourse

University of Antwerp, 2014. Supervisor : Marnix Beyen.

Democratisation fundamentally changed the form and function of parliamentary representation. From an assembly dominated by a class of notables, parliament evolved to an arena where socio-economic antagonisms became more and more explicitly articulated by parties and their leaders. Deliberation in these representative institutions changed from an open discussion between independent MPs, who primarily conceived of themselves as statesmen serving the general good, to a confrontation between more or less disciplined party formations. In my doctorate, through a linguistic analysis, I reveal how the discursive practices of MPs changed in times of democratisation, focusing on the Belgian and Dutch lower chambers. Methodologically speaking, the thesis investigates, from an interdisciplinary perspective, the use of the first person pronouns, such as “I” and “we”, in parliamentary discourse.

The first part of the thesis focuses on patterns of identification by analysing the use of the first-person plural possessive pronoun. I argue that Belgian MPs primarily constructed national identity around legal elements, such as “our constitution”, while phrases which anchor the “we” in “*le pays réel*”, such as “our people”, were largely absent. This sharply contrasted with the rhetoric of the Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, where identification with “people” and

“fatherland” was central to the parliamentary rhetoric.

In the second part, I investigate to what extent a shift from an “I”- to a “we”-centred, deliberative culture occurred. According to my results, the “I” remained by far the most important discursive actor. Instead of resolving into a “we, the party”, the political “ego” became more expressive. The “I” moved from a negotiating actor to an agent who expressed a fixed opinion. These findings warn against overemphasizing the emergence of party discipline and its influence on processes of identity formation.

FRANCINE BOLLE

The Implementation of Contemporary Trade-Union Movements and of new Social Relations in Belgium (1910-1937) - [Original Title : *La mise en place du syndicalisme contemporain et des relations sociales nouvelles en Belgique (1910-1937)*]

Université libre de Bruxelles, 2013. Supervisor : Serge Jaumain.

The inter-war period is crucial to the establishment of contemporary trade-unionism in Belgium. Indeed, the period presents a rise in mass membership and the establishment of a new industrial relations network, predicated on employer and state recognition of trade unions as acknowledged partners in contract negotiations. Unions were also offered an official role at a national level in unemployment benefit distribution, and underwent substantial organisational changes within the movement itself (centralisation, concentration and rationalisation). This study will attempt to show how and according to which models the various components of the trade-union movement participated

in these changes. It will show the role trade unions acquired over the period and how the changes affected the trade-union movement. This overall approach will lead us, in the first part, to reconsider the specific influence of the First World War on particular developments in the world of the trade unions, on industrial relations in general and on Belgian social policy during the years 1919-1921.

The second part offers an analysis of the processes which, during the years 1918-1920, governed the establishment of new industrial relations systems in Belgium, and the trade-union “boom” of the immediate post-war period. The role played by different components of the trade-union world in these developments is evaluated against the background of a troubled social, political and economic immediate post-war landscape. The third part of this thesis is devoted to a study of the consequences of these developments on trade-union doctrine, action and organisational structure during the 1920s and 1930s. The main focus is on conflicts, contradictions and tensions provoked within the Socialist trade-union movement, far more significant numerically than its Catholic, Liberal or neutral counterparts. The purpose is to determine the extent to which such internal tensions and conflicts may have affected the construction of a Socialist trade-union movement.

ARNAUD BOZZINI

Political commitment and identity reconstruction. The communist Jews in Brussels in the aftermath of World War II (1944-1963) - [Original Title :

Engagement politique et reconstruction identitaire. Les Juifs communistes à Bruxelles

au lendemain de la Seconde Guerre mondiale (1944-1963)]

Université libre de Bruxelles, 2012. Supervisor : Jean-Philippe Schreiber.

Whereas the Holocaust has since been invested by three decades of historical research, the situation is quite different for the period of reconstruction of Jewish communities after 1945 which remains largely absent in contemporary historiography. But the crisis which the Holocaust represented allows the analysis of the various processes which occurred and which aimed, in the long term, to reconstruct the Jewish communities of Belgium. This thesis seeks to shed light on the process of a return to normality. The objective is to question the period of reconstruction in terms of political commitment and, more specifically, it is both a socio-political and a cultural history of the reconstruction of the Jewish community in Brussels. The approach adopted identifies the major challenges facing the Jewish communities after the Liberation, as well as the specific responses that political activism brought during a pivotal decade in the history of the Jews of Belgium.

In this using political investment as a source of reconstruction, the analysis focuses on the participation of the community in the Brussels’ far left-wing and communist groups. By understanding the presence and the specific action of communist Jews in rebuilding Brussels, this research highlights how the practical manifestations of political commitment may be a factor of reassertion and reconstruction of the notions of self and their community. To this end, the study is structured primarily on records of the Jewish communist movement in Brussels, and those of its leaders, as well as some

archives from within the Belgian Communist Party. The revisiting of these sources sets this research at the confluence of four interesting historiographical fields: the history of Jews and the Holocaust in Belgium, the history of Jewish communist agitation in Belgium, the history of communism in Belgium more generally, and finally the process of memory formation.

ANNEKE GEYZEN

Culinary “heritagization” in Flanders between 1945 and 2000. A historical gastro-linguistic analysis - [Original

Title : *Culinaire vererfgoed in Vlaanderen tussen 1945 en 2000. Een historisch-gastro-linguïstische analyse*]

Vrije Universiteit Brussel, 2013. Supervisor : Peter Scholliers.

My doctoral dissertation deals with the relationship between food and identity and investigates how “heritagization” contributes to this relationship. More specifically, I have investigated the relationship between culinary “heritagization” and identification processes in Flanders between 1945 and 2000. The research’s theoretical framework builds on the notion of heritagization as an intellectual process of appropriation in which interested parties with a varying ideological background and motivation confer new meanings upon certain aspects of material and intangible culture. This is done by means of a vocabulary that suggests a historical (authenticity, tradition, grandmother’s cooking) and/or geographical (geographical indications and *terroir*) anchorage.

The sources I selected are women’s magazines from a different ideological background : the rural/christian magazine *De Boerin/Bij de Haard/Eigen Aard* (*The Farmer Woman/*

Around the Hearth/Own Nature) the socialist magazine *De Stem der Vrouw* (*The Woman’s Voice*) and the commercial magazine *Het Rijk der Vrouw* (*The Woman’s Realm*). The methodology to which the sources were subjected, combines a quantitative predicate analysis on the one hand and a qualitative, close-reading on the other. The predicate analysis identified heritagization as a fragmented process where women’s magazines mainly featured food preservation, feasts and *terroir*. Close reading, in turn, shows that heritagization strongly differs according to ideology, in which magazines’ appropriations of material and intangible food culture always contributed to identity and identification discourses. Heritagization contributed to Christian family values and agrarian politics in *De Boerin*, *Bij de Haard* and *Eigen Aard*; to women’s emancipation in *De Stem der Vrouw*; and to family values and connoisseurship in *Het Rijk der Vrouw*. Through this, the empirical analysis has allowed the development of two new analytical concepts in the field : heritagization moments and heritagization conflicts.

VERA HAJTÓ

Milk Sauce and Paprika: Migration, Childhood and Memory of the Inter-war Belgian-Hungarian Child Relief Project

KU Leuven. Supervisor : Patrick Pasture. Co-supervisor : Idesbald Goddeeris.

Shortly after the First World War, transnational and national social institutions set up a humanitarian child relief organisation between Hungary and Belgium. Within this project, thousands of Hungarian children moved between the two countries. Some of them spent their holiday in Belgium and

then returned to their Hungarian families, others remained with their foster families forever. The relief project and its national and transnational organisers (the Catholic Church and community for the most part) significantly influenced the lives of families and the lives of all of the children regardless of the children's later trajectories.

The main question of the present study is how experiences of migration influence the representation of childhood. This study explores the relationship between migration and childhood and explicitly demonstrates these two social constructions are significantly interconnected. This interconnectedness is strongly motivated by the observation that creation and negotiation of identities are central to both migration and childhood and that the realm of memory has a decisive influence on the conceptualisation of the two.

Based on many different sources, such as official documentations, contemporary newspapers, public and private collections of photographs, family correspondences, biographies and interviews, this work discovers the political, social and cultural impacts of the Belgian-Hungarian child relief project on the two countries and on the participating families. The research reveals that one of the crucial influences of the relief project was turning the Belgian holiday into a migration experience regardless of the trajectories of the children. Even those children who returned to their home country after their temporary stay abroad, tended to relate and remember about their holiday as a life-changing experience; a journey that took them across national and cultural borders and defined their memories of childhood.

MADELEINE JACQUEMIN

Fer-Fonte-Acier. Steel Industry in Walloon Brabant. History of the Clabecq steel foundries, 1781-1939 -

[Original Title : *Fer-Fonte-Acier. L'industrie sidérurgique en Brabant wallon. Histoire des Forges de Clabecq des origines à 1939*]

Université libre de Bruxelles, 2013. Supervisors : Jean-Jacques Heirwegh & Serge Jaumain.

The thesis deals with the history of the *Forges de Clabecq*, its workers, the families that founded and developed the company, and its managers. The foundry remained the property of three families until 1942. The steel foundries in question are all located in the Brabant province outside the three main industrial areas (Namur-Charleroi, Liège and Luxembourg). They were established along the canal linking Charleroi to Brussels, on the territories of Clabecq and Tubize, along the Senne river whose water it used.

On 8 November 1781, Marc Pierre Van Esschen (1754-1838) signed a lease contract for a piece of land of about 2,088.94 square metres for 20 years. The owner of the land was the last lord of Clabecq, viscount Antoine Otton de Flodorp (1711-1791). 107 years after the signature of the lease contract, the heirs of Josse Goffin created a public limited company entitled "Forges de Clabecq" for the exploitation the factories in Clabecq.

Initially, the factories' work focussed on the transformation of metals. They sourced raw materials from the region of Charleroi (pig iron, then large quantities of ingots and blooms) for the rolling mills. From 1909, the business activities of the company were centred on the production and transformation of steel. As a result, the company became a

steel producer and equipped itself with the complex infrastructure required : plant, forges, foundries, plate rolling mills, blast furnaces with cokes ovens, Thomas converters, a power plant etc.

CHRISTIAN JANSSENS

Maurice Maeterlinck, an Author in the Cinema of the 1910s and the 1920s : History, Sociology and Aesthetics

- [Original Title : *Maurice Maeterlinck, un auteur dans le cinéma des années 1910 et 1920 : une approche historique, sociologique et esthétique*] Université libre de Bruxelles, 2012. Supervisors : Dominique Nasta & Paul Aron.

Research on the literary works of Maurice Maeterlinck is common but his activity in the cinema is less known and less studied. This PhD thesis is based on the concepts of the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu; its purpose is to bring new information by analysing the trajectory of the author in the field of cinema during the 1910s and the 1920s at a time when he was most interested in it.

The study includes three analyses. The first concerns Maeterlinck's point of view, his entrance into the cinematic field. The author who was recognised in his first field developed several products in the new invested field directed at his broader and more diverse public. The second analysis concerns the transformations of the cinematic field and the point of view of the other actors, like the production houses and their distribution. These houses inserted the adaptations of the author into a series of more or less standardised products. The third analysis concerns certain films and planned films of the 1910s and the 1920s, adapted from

Maurice Maeterlinck's literary works (e.g. *The Blue Bird* and *Maurice Tourneur* of 1918). The external components (the organisation of the project, the production or the exploitation) and the internal components (the direction or the lighting) indicate the author's position relative to the industry and how the industry itself was organised.

GEERT LELOUP

No Illusionary Power. Genesis, Role and Power(lessness) of the Court of Audit (1814-1939)

- [Original Title : *Non pas un pouvoir illusoire. Ontstaan, rol en (on)macht van het Rekenhof (1814-1939)*] Universiteit Gent, 2013. Supervisor : Luc François.

The Court of Audit was set up by a Decree of 30 December 1830, which makes it one of Belgium's oldest institutions. The Court is largely known to the Belgian public, but in a rather general way. Indeed, its internal manner of functioning and its competences remain relatively unfamiliar. Nevertheless, the Court of Audit plays a crucial role within the State, as it supervises public finance at federal, regional and provincial levels, and performs a balancing act between the legislative and executive powers. This doctoral thesis describes the context in which the Court of Audit was created, the role it played until the eve of World War II, and its possible influence on policy. The Court was also of great importance in the context of the controversial investigation into the finances of the (Belgian) Congo before World War I. In this inquiry, the most important sources were the particularly rich and voluminous historical archives of the Court. These archives have recently been made accessible through a simultaneously established finding aid, transferred to the National Archives of Belgium and opened up

for research. The most significant conclusion of this thesis reveals that the Court was a barometer of the actual balance of power within the Belgian State and society.

ARNAUD PETERS

Race for Innovation and Patent Policies. Technological Developments in the Zinc Industry (1806-1873) -

[Original Title : *Course à l'innovation et mécanique des brevets. L'évolution technologique dans l'industrie du zinc (1806-1873)*] Université de Liège, 2014. Supervisor : Eric Geerkens.

In the young Belgian State, weakened by its international status, technological innovation appeared to be not only a national priority but also an efficient means to facilitate entrepreneurial development. As a consequence, a competition for innovation took place in the context of the Belgian industrial expansion of the 19th century.

This thesis focuses on the multiple issues of this competition. The first part analyses the establishment of the Belgian patent system. How was it designed by the first Belgian governments? Which were its characteristics? How did it promote competition for innovation? Through this viewpoint, references and singularities revealed by the legal frameworks of the patent system are highlighted. Furthermore, the analysis shows the impact of individual and collective patenting activities on the development of the system.

The second part of the thesis is devoted to a case study based on a sectoral approach. Through the study of the first European multinational enterprise – *S.A. des Mines et Fonderies de zinc de la Vieille-Montagne* – the relation between patents and technical

innovation is discussed. What do patents reveal about technologies and their development? By which mechanisms do they contribute to innovation? The technical analysis of a series of 200 carefully selected patents is achieved by resorting to company archives. It demonstrates the dynamic dimension of the innovative processes and the importance of steps like tests and errors, hesitations, failures. This technical history of the zinc sector also highlights the strategies defined by industrialists in order to overcome the major problems linked to the use of technologies, namely the imperfection of the reduction methods, pollution, mechanization and diversification.

PIETER RAYMAEKERS

Engineering a New World. The socio-professional history of engineers in Belgium (1850-1914) - [Original Title :

Makers van een nieuwe wereld. De socio-professionele geschiedenis van ingenieurs in België (1850-1914)]

KU Leuven, Kadoc, 2013. Supervisor : Jan De Maeyer.

The engineer was a symbol as well as a driving force of the transition from a pre-industrial, agrarian society into the industrial, capitalist and modern world. New technical possibilities and professional developments turned him into an emblematic person of change and progress, indispensable in the eyes and plans of government, industry and bourgeoisie. It is not surprising therefore that, since the 1980s, both the historical and sociological research on the modern engineer has multiplied. Our research has an international and comparative dimension, yet we focus mainly on the Belgian case during the second half of the so-called long nineteenth century : the period between 1850 and 1914.

The two-fold process of professionalisation and segmentation, two concepts closely linked to the sociology of professions, provide the theoretical background of the research. Professionalisation refers to the development by which a professional group gradually acquires a set of fundamental attributes like their own system of higher education, their own network of representative associations, a well-defined professional practice and specific social ideas.

Segmentation explains the way a professional group is subdivided into different groups or “segments”. The term “engineer” implies a whole range of interpretations, both on an international scale and within national boundaries. American sociology even makes mention of a profession without a community. Accordingly, the engineering profession was faced with heterogeneity, fragmentation and even rivalry. Belgium too was a melting pot of engineering cultures.

The thesis covers three chronological periods : the genesis (until 1850), the emergence (1850-75) and the breakthrough (1875-1914) of the modern engineer, or in other words: the awakening in, the construction of and finally the conquest of a new world. In each of these periods we systematically shed light on three main aspects : the engineering education, the engineering associations and the social role of engineers.

BÉNÉDICTE ROCHET

Newsreels at the Service of History. The Belgian Government's Audiovisual Propaganda During the War (1940-1945) - [Original Title :

Des actualités filmées au service de l'histoire. La propaganda audiovisuelle d'un

gouvernement belge en état de siege (1940-1945)]

Université de Namur, 2014. Supervisor : Axel Tixhon.

In September 1940, the Belgian government, which was reconstituted in exile in London, tried to impose and legitimize its existence by setting up an information and propaganda policy. Cinema quickly aroused the interest of Belgian propagandists. Newsreels, because of their – supposed – influence on public opinion, appeared as a formidable weapon. Building on the cinematic practices of their British allies and without any experience, Belgians embarked on a film propaganda adventure that would take them from London to Brussels and as far as the Congo. The newsreels were supposed to highlight the country's war effort, legitimize the authority and action of the Belgian government in exile and enhance national cohesion. The analysis of the production, distribution and reception of these newsreels, produced between 1940 and 1945, allows us to understand, on the one hand, film and propagandist practices, and on the other hand, reactions and successive stands of public opinion in wartime. The images broadcast on the screens in London and Brussels at the Liberation reveal the mental representation of the conflict and the mechanisms set to control public opinion. Beyond the historical problems, this thesis, which is anchored on a vast film corpus, highlights the contribution of the audiovisual source for the historical discipline. The latter is helpful for the development of methodological protocols that combine film and non-film sources to allow a better comprehension of the historicity of the audiovisual source, to understand the whole cinematographic fact, and to contextualize it. This thesis also highlights the issues of audiovisual heritage access and rights and their impact on Belgian

historiography, where research in the field of ‘history and cinema’ remains incomplete.

LAWRENCE VAN HAECKE

Repression and purges : The protection of the external security of the State as a politico-legal problem during the Belgian regime crisis, 1932-1948 - [Original Title : *Repressie en*

epuratie. De bescherming van de uitwendige veiligheid van de Staat als politiek-juridisch probleem tijdens de Belgische regimecrisis (1932-1948)]

Universiteit Gent, 2014. Supervisor : Karel Velle. Co-supervisor: Dirk Luyten.

This research offers new insights into the repression of collaboration after the Second World War. First, the author attempts this through a thorough analysis of new and largely-unused archival sources. Secondly, he views the repression of collaborators not as a process in itself, as part of a much broader period than sometimes considered, which mostly, but not exclusively, encompasses the 1930s.

In this decade, the crisis of the democratic regime began. The mainly-conservative elites strengthen the penal law to defend the Belgian State against their enemies (mostly communists or Flemish nationalists). These draft and voted laws were not free of political ambiguity, but offered the necessary precedent as a comparison to the repressive legislation enacted by the Pierlot government in London. Of course, the repression of collaboration after the First World War is also important.

These comparisons are also put to use into the postwar period, when the repression of collaboration was pursued by military courts, as politicians prepared reforms to speed-

up the punishment of suspects. Thus, this research is able to clearly show the influence of the reforms in the latter part of 1945 on the policies of the military prosecutor’s office. Lastly, the Royal Question heralded the last phase of the crisis of the Belgian democratic regime. This research is able to retrace the general effect of this important political problem on the Belgian parties and their plans for the repression of collaboration.

SARAH VAN RUYSKENSVELDE

‘Education in Turmoil’. A history of Catholic secondary education during the Second World War in Belgium -

[Original Title : *Onderwijs in het oog van de storm. Een geschiedenis van het katholiek middelbaar onderwijs tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog in België*]

KU Leuven, Universiteit Antwerpen, 2014. Supervisors : Marc Depaepe (*KU Leuven*) & Marnix Beyen (*Universiteit Antwerpen*).

At the basis of the dissertation lies the question whether the German military occupation of Belgium during the Second World War affected the development of Catholic secondary education for boys. More specifically, this study investigates the nature of the educational policy of the German military government during the Second World War. It deals with the question as to what extent the occupier applied the educational system as a (political) tool for gaining acceptance for the regime across the layers of society.

It also focuses on the relation between the German regime and the Roman Catholic Church which held authority over the network of (unsubsidized) private schools. This dissertation above all answers the question about the extent to which the war and external political situation penetrated the

classroom, and whether or not teachers and pupils were politically engaged for or against the German regime. Lastly, this study focuses on patterns in the war memories of teachers in Episcopal secondary schools and pupils in Jesuit secondary schools in both Flanders and Wallonia, and frames them within current historiography.

This study shows that German educational policy was founded on a so-called *Gleichschaltung* ("coordination" or "unification") of the Belgian educational system. The restriction of Episcopal power over education and the reversal of the development of Catholic schools were important conditions for the German regime's aspiration of total control and power. Yet the German occupation of Belgium cannot be considered as a unilateral imposition of German rules and control. The Catholic Church and its schools were not merely victims of the occupation. The war and German occupation did not radically change the Catholic school culture, but stirred up new dynamics from below.

MARIE-ANNE WEISERS

Judging Crimes against the Jews : Germans before Belgian Courts

(1941-1951) - [Original Title : *Juger les crimes contre les Juifs : des Allemands devant les tribunaux belges, 1941-1951*]

Université libre de Bruxelles, 2014. Supervisor : Pieter Lagrou.

This thesis addresses the issue of the prosecution and trials of the crimes committed against Jews in occupied Belgium during the Second World War. The research sheds new light on the work of the Belgian military tribunals by placing the trials in a historical context which dates back to World War I. In addition, it documents Jewish persecution

in Belgium, for beside the prosecution and trials, much attention is payed to the crimes themselves.

The first part outlines the national and international legal framework which after the war served as bedrock for war crimes trials, whereas the second embarks upon specific case studies. The first case is the trial of Otto Siegburg, a German policeman, "Jew hunter" and head of an arrest team of the Brussels Sipos-SD's Jew section. His case is exceptional, for the defendant was not sentenced to death for war crimes, as was the usual procedure, but for crimes against humanity. This important legal classification has so far been ignored by Belgian historians and legal scholars alike. This and the second case underpin the major conclusion of the thesis, namely that, in contrast to what is widely believed, the Belgian judicial authorities were not indifferent or hardly sensitive to the crimes against the Jews. On the contrary, the archives consulted show in Ganshof van der Meersch, who was the Chief Military Prosecutor, but also in the case of the magistrates and judges of the Military courts, a real determination to prosecute and punish the criminals.

