

BELGIAN HISTORY AND THE MAKING OF MARGINALITY AND SUBALTERNITY

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While the making of marginality and subalternity in historical perspective has attracted increased international academic interest in recent years, historians of nineteenth and twentieth century Belgium seem to have been little influenced by these developments. Belgian scholars have certainly paid attention to the construction of “otherness” and to the marginalisation of social categories on the basis of gender, ethnicity, age, class, respectability and sexual orientation, but they have rarely placed their analyses within precise conceptual and methodological frameworks. This introductory essay aims to reflect on these historiographical trends and their echoes in Belgian history while examining the ways in which explorations of subaltern/marginal categories in late-modern and contemporary contexts – like the ones presented in this special issue – can contribute to spurring on new discussions about Belgian society and the construction of the logics of in/exclusion in a historical perspective.

Living on the Edge: The Making of Marginality and Subalternity

Historical scholarship on late-modern and contemporary Belgium seems to have been little influenced by theoretical developments in the international historiography of marginality and the construction of otherness. Similarly, the (more) recent global breakthrough of subaltern studies has received little attention among historians of Belgium. Belgian academic research has been rather slow in responding to historiographical turns,² and likewise it has also been little touched by the postcolonial critiques that have accompanied debates on subaltern studies.³ The subaltern project was brought into being in the early 1980s by a collective of scholars working on South Asian history and society who explored the conditions and

¹ This special issue emerged from a workshop organised by Amandine Lauro and Magaly Rodríguez García at the Université libre de Bruxelles (2 July 2014) within the context of a Postdoctoral Intercommunity Mandate of the Francqui Foundation. We would like to thank the two institutions and the Centre de Recherche Mondes Modernes & Contemporains for their support and all the presenters for their insights and debates, as well as the three anonymous peer reviewers for their useful comments.

² Patricia Van Den Eeckout & Peter Scholliers, “Social History in Belgium: Old Habits and New Perspectives”, in *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis*, no. 23, 1997 (2), p. 147-181.

³ This is not typical of historical research, and this observation appears to be relevant for Belgian social science research at large. See for instance, Sarah Demart, “Congoese Migrations to Belgium and Postcolonial Perspectives”, in *African Diaspora*, no. 6, 2013 (1), p. 1-20.

consciousness of subordinate groups in (colonial) India independently of elites' agendas and interpretations. As such, it has been particularly influential in the renewal of postcolonial studies and inspired research well beyond its initial geographical and intellectual programme. As Todd Shepard has recently observed, "...it remains exceedingly rare that historiographies anchored outside the West resonate widely."⁴ This is certainly one of the most notable accomplishments that subaltern studies have achieved. The fact that the study of colonialism in Belgium has long been considered a marginal, "exotic" field of inquiry with little impact on metropolitan history⁵ and that the "global turn" has been belatedly received in the national scholarship⁶ can in part explain the absence of a fertile ground for the development of subaltern-inspired approaches.

Still, the lessons to be learned from these studies and the challenges they have brought to historical writing go beyond the initial colonial/global scope. The term "subaltern" itself originated in the military language of modern Europe and referred to soldiers of inferior ranks. In the Subaltern School perspective,⁷ it draws upon the work of Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci on groups living outside of hegemonic social, cultural and power structures in pre-capitalist nineteenth century Italy. It broadly refers to "the general attribute of subordination [...] whether it is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way."⁸ As such (and even if the definition of the concept remains highly debated), this conceptualisation of the subaltern is not limited to the Asian or the (post)colonial context. It can be mobilised to study a wide range of social groups who share a subordinate status and

⁴ Todd Shepard, "'History is Past Politics'? Archives, 'Tainted Evidence', and the Return of the State", in *American Historical Review*, no. 115, 2010 (2), p. 474-483, 474.

⁵ On the historiography of Belgian colonialism and its relationship with metropolitan historiography, see Hein Van Hee and Geert Castrijk, "Belgische historiografie en verbeelding over het koloniale verleden", in *Revue Belge d'Histoire Contemporaine/Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, no. 32, 2002 (3-4), p. 306-320; Guy Vanthemsche, "The Historiography of Belgian Colonialism in the Congo", in Casba Levai (ed.), *Europe and the World in European Historiography*, Pisa, Edizione Plus – Pisa University Press, 2006, p. 89-119.

⁶ See the interesting comment (which is more focused on "transnational" than on global history) made by Christophe Verbruggen, Daniel Laqua and Gita Deneckere, "Belgium on the Move: Transnational History and the Belle-Epoque", in *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire/Belgische Tijdschrift voor en Geschiedenis*, no. 90, 2012 (4), p. 1213-1226; Daniel Laqua, Christophe Verbruggen, Gita Deneckere, Pierre-Yves Saunier, Timothy Baycroft and Martin Conway, "Beyond Belgium: Encounters, Exchanges and Entanglements", in *Journal of Belgian History/Revue Belge d'Histoire Contemporaine/Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, no. 43, 2013 (4), p. 148-163.

⁷ On the concepts developed by subaltern studies, see (among a vast literature) the critical perspectives of Jacques Pouchepadass, "Les Subaltern Studies ou la critique postcoloniale de la modernité", in *L'Homme*, no. 156, 2000, p. 161-186; David Ludden (ed.), *Reading Subaltern Studies: Critical History, Contested Meaning and the Globalization of South Asia*, London, Anthem Press, 2001; Partha Chatterjee, "A Brief History of Subaltern Studies", in Sebastian Conrad et al. (eds.), *Transnationale Geschichte. Themen, Tendenzen und Theorien*, Göttingen, 2006, p. 94-104.

⁸ As defined by one of the founding fathers of subaltern studies: Ranajit Guha, "On Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India", in Vinayak Chaturvedi (ed.), *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*, London/New York, Verso, 2000, p. 3.

variable degrees of subjection to elite dominance or hegemonic discourses in multiple historical contexts. The term can thus refer to large societal categories (for instance women, children or the urban poor), as well as to smaller marginalised or excluded groups (such as vagrants, convicts or sexual minorities).⁹

Both types of subalternity (broad social categories and more delimited marginalised groups) are explored in this special issue. The authors address the intersections and the conceptual complexity of such fluctuant, heterogeneous and overlapping categories. In doing so, they respond to our initial call to interrogate the applicability of the notions of subalternity and marginality in contemporary Belgian contexts. While avoiding essentialist definitions of both concepts, we required them to establish a dialogue with the international scholarly literature on marginality and subalternity and to inquire the extent to which such a conversation would deliver new insights to the historiography in Belgium and abroad. Hence rather than proposing a close definition *of* these notions, we encouraged the contributors to think *with* them as “analytical and interpretative methods”.¹⁰

The chapters included here do not aim to provide an extensive account of the construction of subalternity nor of what it meant (and took) to be marginalised in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Belgium. Rather, they pursue a more exploratory goal based on a critical assessment of the (limited) existing research on the making of otherness in Belgium. Through explorations of disparate social groups such as delinquent girls, the elderly confined in Brussels’ asylums, French deserters exiled in Belgium or silenced schoolboys, these essays offer complementary avenues of investigation and methodological reflections. They certainly do not present an overall snapshot of the many issues at stake but instead seek to encourage discussions on marginal groups and the logics of in/exclusion in order to open up new perspectives on Belgian history. Each in their own way, they demonstrate how the analytical frames of marginality and subalternity can be productively used to write alternative histories of the social, political or judicial.

The relationship between the margin and the centre, between the subaltern and the elite, has always been a dialectical one (even if it is one full of contradictions and

⁹ Stephanie Cronin (ed.), *Subaltern and Social Protest: History from Below in the Middle East and North Africa*, London, Routledge, 2008, p. 8.

¹⁰ This formulation is borrowed from Will Jackson and Emily J. Manktelow, “Introduction: Thinking with Deviance”, in Will Jackson and Emily J. Manktelow (eds), *Subverting Empire: Deviance and Disorder in the British Colonial World*, Basingtoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 17.

ambiguities). It is from these inextricable links that “contradictions and paradoxes”¹¹ emerge which have proved so interesting for sociologists and historians. Investigating people’s lives and identities as well as exclusionary practices and the strategies of resistance utilised by marginalised and subaltern men and women can therefore offer unique vantage points onto mechanisms of differentiation and domination (re)produced by the centre.¹²

While the second wave of subaltern studies (“the late Subaltern Studies”¹³) has been marked by a shift towards postmodern, poststructuralist, and more discursive analysis prioritising epistemic interrogations grounded in literary and cultural perspectives, the initial project built upon older historical traditions of the “history from below”. Inspired by both British Marxist historians and the French *Annales* (and later the *Nouvelle Histoire*), it echoed some of their interrogations, challenged elitist “grand” narratives and took up “ordinary” people, class and hegemony, as well as struggle and resistance from a bottom-up angle.¹⁴ These studies flourished in the 1960s and ‘70s, helping encourage an increased interest in marginals and outcasts to such a point that a French medievalist could speak of “a Copernican revolution” while referring to the new historiography.¹⁵ Of course, historical explorations of people who lived on the margins of society were not new in those decades. The categories of deprivation and poverty in particular had already been studied, but much of that research had focused on politics and institutions (whether repressive, philanthropic or for relief), and vagrants, beggars, prostitutes and the poor in general were mainly seen through the eyes of legislators, theologians and other social reformers.¹⁶ It was only in the 1970s that historians started to look more closely at the experiences, identities and (sub)culture of marginalised groups and to favour a more actor-centred approach.¹⁷

Nevertheless, the dynamics of labelling and the drawing of normative lines of in/exclusion are worthy of the renewed attention of historians of the nineteenth and twentieth

¹¹ Alison Woodward and Martin Kohli, “European Societies: Inclusions/Exclusions?”, in Alison Woodward and Martin Kohli (eds), *Inclusions and Exclusions in European Societies*, London, Routledge, 2001, p. 1.

¹² For a similar approach (“For better or for worse, what happens at the margins concerns more than the margins themselves and affects the center as well”), see Castica Bradatan and Aurelian Craiutu, “Introduction: The Paradoxes of Marginality”, in *The European Legacy: Towards New Paradigms*, no. 17, 2012 (6), p. 721-729. See also Neil Gregor, Niels Roemer and Mark Roseman (eds.), *German History from the Margins*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2006, p. 2-3.

¹³ Sumit Sakar, “The Decline of the Subaltern in Subaltern Studies”, in David Ludden (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 400-429.

¹⁴ On the intellectual influences of subaltern studies, see Isabelle Merle, “Les Subaltern Studies. Retour sur les principes fondateurs d’un projet historique de l’Inde coloniale”, in *Genèses*, no. 56, 2004 (3), p. 131-147.

¹⁵ Jean-Claude Schmitt, “L’histoire des marginaux”, in Jacques Le Goff (ed.), *La Nouvelle Histoire*, Paris, Complexe, 1979, p. 277-305.

¹⁶ Moreover, most of those studies concerned the medieval and the modern period and only some specific categories of marginalised groups (such as heretics, lepers, witches, etc.).

¹⁷ The work of Bronislaw Geremek was particularly influential in this regard: Bronislaw Geremek, *Les marginaux parisiens aux XIV^e et XV^e siècles*, Paris, Flammarion, 1976.

centuries. In this regard, the work of Michel Foucault has been particularly influential, even if marginality was never really a central concept in his research. However, much has yet to be said about the constant redefinition (and reassertion) of social norms and the shifting boundaries between “respectable” and “deviant” activities in line with the rapid social change, political turmoil and evolving knowledge regimes that characterised the contemporary period. Here again, parallels could be usefully drawn with some of the reflections proposed by colonial studies. For instance, questions about “how a grammar of difference was continuously and vigilantly crafted”¹⁸ appear particularly relevant for the study of the margin-centre dynamics in European contexts.

The emergence of new tools and figures of expertise (whether linked to state or private actors) and their growing importance in the nineteenth century¹⁹ also influenced the ways in which some social categories were (re)defined, managed and marginalised. As Veerle Massin demonstrates in her contribution on the rise of methods of assessment for young delinquent girls in twentieth-century Belgium, “specialists” were key actors in the definition and legitimisation of renewed conceptions (and lexicons) of liminal status and behaviours presented as threatening the social body. The international recognition of Belgium as a pioneering country in the field of observing – and assessing – minors was already firmly established in the mid-twentieth century. This led to a unique and constantly reinterpreted etiology of female juvenile delinquency that combined psychological, sociological and psychoanalytical expertise to inform judicial decisions, institutionalise practices and renew arguments which made claims about the social disqualification of delinquent girls. At the same time, expertise could produce unprecedented interactions and power relations which could themselves open new (even if limited) spaces of negotiations and contestations. In this regard (as in many others), the study of the twentieth century calls for specific interrogations about new forms of state interventionism, social engineering, the expansion of the welfare state, neo-liberal reforms, and henceforth strategies of relief and regulation. In a context of ever-accelerating globalisation, it also raises questions about possible Belgian specificities and the weight of the global circulation of discourses related to marginality and difference,

¹⁸ Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda”, in Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (eds.), *Tensions of Empire. Colonial Culture in a Bourgeois World*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997, p. 3-4.

¹⁹ See for instance Christelle Rabier, “Expertise in Historical Perspective”, in Christelle Rabier (ed.), *Fields of Expertise: A Comparative History of Expert Procedure in Paris and London, 1600 to Present*, Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007, p. 1-15; Ludivine Bantigny, “Usages, mésusages et contre-usages de l'expertise. Une perspective historique”, in *Histoire@Politique. Politique, culture, société*, no. 14, 2012 (2), <http://www.histoire-politique.fr/index.php?numero=14&rub=dossier&item=136> (accessed 13 February 2016).

including scientific ones, as “marginality” became a concept mobilised by social scientists in the interwar period.²⁰

The rise of the study of marginals by social historians in the 1970s also owed a lot to the success of the “marginality theory” that was then flourishing in other social sciences. Sociologists and geographers in particular broadened the use of the concept (although in quite distinct ways) to address issues of disadvantage and exclusion (in terms of power, resources, participation and integration) and to discuss the cultural, social and structural understandings of phenomena that soon appeared difficult to define.²¹ From the start, marginality was therefore constructed as a multidisciplinary object. Its very vocabulary refers to the notion of space and physical distance from the centre, and to locations on the edge or at the fringe. The Merriam-Webster dictionary provides the following definition of the word “marginal”:

“relating to, or situated at a margin or border.”²² Early on, the concept of marginality was also appropriated by non-Western academic circles. Its popularity among leftist Latin American scholars working on the effects of the dramatic urban growth and industrialisation in the 1960s and 1970s testifies to this. These evolutions were presented as having generated the apparition of “marginal masses” excluded from the modern capitalist sector and characterised by a condition of dependency. However, the concept has since undergone considerable criticism. Starting in the 1980s, scholars increasingly argued that theories of marginality contributed to the reproduction of a binary (and therefore essentialist) vision of society and that the margins-centre relationship was simplistically considered in terms of exclusion and segregation while neglecting the interactions and reciprocal dependencies that existed.²³ Also

²⁰ Matthias Bernt and Laura Colini, *Exclusion, Marginalization and Peripheralization. Conceptual Concerns in the Study of Urban Inequalities*, Working Paper, Erkner, Leibniz Institute for Regional Development and Structural Planning, 2013, p. 14. See also Janet Mancini Bilson, “No Owners of Soil: Redefining the Concept of Marginality”, in Rutledge M. Dennis (ed.), *Marginality, Power and Social Structure: Issues in Race, Class and Gender Analysis*, Oxford, Elsevier, 2005, p. 29.

²¹ See Janet Mancini Bilson, *op. cit.*; and Robert J. Dunne, “Marginality: A Conceptual Extension”, in Rutledge M. Dennis (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 11-27. For an overview of the uses of the concept of marginality in geographical research, see Heiki Jussila and Walter Leimgruber (eds), *Perceptions of Marginality: Theoretical Issues and Regional Perceptions of Marginality in Geographical Space*, London, Ashgate, 1998.

²² “Marginal”, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/marginal> (accessed 13 February 2016). It is interesting to note that one of the “founding fathers” of the concept of marginality elaborated his theoretical reflections in the 1920s to refer to the interpenetration of cultures which resulted from accelerating migratory patterns and contact between Europe and other continents at the turn of the century. So “the marginal man” was initially conceptualised via a close link with globalisation as a “cultural hybrid, a man living and sharing intimately in the cultural life and traditions of two distinct peoples [and] a man on the margin of two cultures and two societies, which never completely interpenetrated and fused.” Robert Park, “Human Migration and the Marginal Man”, in *American Journal of Sociology*, no. 33, 1928 (6), p. 881-893, 892.

²³ For a recent critical overview of the legacy of these studies (in connection to the recent work of sociologist Loïc Wacquant on “advanced marginality”), see Teresa P.R. Caldeira, “Marginality, Again?!” in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, no. 33, 2009 (3), p. 848-853. See also Jose A. Del Pilar and Jocelynda

among historians, the study of “marginals” weakened in the 1990s when words like “underclass”, “excluded” and “minorities” were deemed to be more appropriate, even in the French tradition which had been so prolific and straightforward in this field.²⁴

In this special issue, we encourage a more nuanced approach to marginalised groups in a historical perspective. We use marginality as a complex and dynamic framework of analysis or, as in the words of another historian (of subalternity), as “a socially contingent process rather than as a category of identity.”²⁵ All of the chapters explore the positional and relative nature of marginality and/or subalternity, concepts which have fluctuant boundaries that are constantly redefined in the light of shifting normative constraints. Such a perspective makes it possible to reflect on positions and activities that are thought to deviate from cultural and/or social standards as well as on the ways by which the barriers that distance them from the centre have been built and transgressed. Indeed, while we agree that marginalities limit the access of marginalised groups and individuals to certain rights, spaces, resources and opportunities, we also think that those who are labelled “marginal” can be treated as being part of, as well as “alien” to, mainstream society.²⁶ Sophie Richelle’s study on the elderly in nineteenth-century Brussels convincingly demonstrates this point. Richelle's paper also reminds us that the history of old age and its institutionalisation is a complex one that could benefit from more intersectional analyses that take into consideration not only age but also wealth, gender and degrees of confinement – all of which contribute to the production of different degrees of marginalisation. Indeed, despite the potential coercive dimension of this process, the margins can also provide spaces of agency and mobilisation where subordinate statuses can be played out and challenged.

A plurality of groups and individuals can be included in this loose conception of marginality and subalternity. Despite the inherent disparity of the categories that these concepts might encompass, we believe that they can convey a unique sense of (and vantage point on) power dynamics and social relations. They can trigger fascinating questions and stimulate comparative research on the construction and negotiation of lines of social and political inclusion and exclusion in contemporary Belgium and abroad. While the lack of

O. Udasco, “Marginality Theory: The Lack of Construct Validity”, in *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, no. 26, 2004 (1), p. 3-15.

²⁴ Raymond Grew, “Introduction”, in André Burguière and Raymond Grew (eds), *The Construction of Minorities: Cases for Comparison Across Time and Around the World*, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 2001, p. 1.

²⁵ Clare Anderson, *Subaltern Lives: Biographies of Colonialism in the Indian Ocean World 1790-1920*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 7.

²⁶ Rutledge M. Dennis, “Marginality”, in George Ritzer (ed.), *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, Blackwell Publishing, 2007 *Blackwell Reference Online* (accessed 24 July 2015).

precise contours has been one of the main criticisms of the old theory of marginality, this is precisely the vagueness we aim to embrace. Living on the margins of society proved in some cases to be a fluid and transitory condition, to say nothing of the rapid transformations that made “vices become habits and new taboos take the place of old prohibitions.”²⁷ That is what makes the study of marginality such a rich field for historical explorations and why we postulate that the concept itself, as well as that of subalternity, constitutes a stimulating analytical tool. Despite their intrinsic ambiguity and relativity, we – and the authors of this special issue – find both notions useful as a means of interrogating the boundaries and categories of Belgian history.

Looking for (Belgian) Subaltern Voices

Almost three decades have passed since Gayatri Spivak published her landmark essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”²⁸ In spite of the many different responses that scholars have tried to bring to this provocative question, the methodological and practical issues it raised (among other fundamental ones)²⁹ remain thorny for the study of marginal and subaltern groups. As Christopher A. Bayly has noted, the radical change in historical orientation proposed by subaltern-studies historians has not exactly rested on the use of new source material.³⁰ Surprisingly, they have made little use of oral history, indigenous sources, or even material related to popular culture. While a radical reappraisal of the relationship between text and power, and of the archive itself, has been a key element of the “paradigm shift”³¹ encouraged by the subaltern project, its methodological approach has primarily consisted of re-reading colonial and literate/elite sources and trying to locate subaltern experiences and agency within them. In particular, the pioneering work of Ranajit Guha on peasant rebellions in South Asia³²

²⁷ Eugene Rogan, “Introduction”, in Eugene Rogan (ed.), *Outside in: On the Margins of Modern Middle-East*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2002, p. 3.

²⁸ Gayatri C. Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, in Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1988, p. 25-48.

²⁹ We are aware that the challenges raised by scholars of subaltern studies concerning the very foundations of the historical discipline largely exceed the methodological aspects we have selectively chosen to underline here. For a recent overview of the legacies of Spivak's question, see Rosalind C. Norris (ed.), *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2010.

³⁰ Christopher A. Bayly, “Rallying around the Subaltern”, in Vinayak Chatuverdi (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 117.

³¹ Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Historiography”, in *Nepantla: Views from the South*, no. 1, 2000 (1), p. 14.

³² Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1983. For a more theoretical reflection on this methodology, see also Id., “The Prose of Counter-Insurgency”, in Ranajit Guha & Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (eds), *Selected Subaltern Studies*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 45-87.

made an important contribution in this regard; his reading “against the grain”³³ of British colonial reports and his programmatic attention to the deconstruction of the rationale of colonial knowledge and of nationalist teleological discourses have inspired many researchers. For historians of subaltern studies, this “against the grain” approach to colonial sources appears as both a semiotic and a political enterprise which seeks not only to reveal the voices and meaning-making of subalterns and their subject position but also to analyse the specific power dynamics at the heart of the colonial (textual) regime. By definition, this reading is also a fragmentary and fluctuant one. As the subaltern subject “emerges between the folds of the discourses, in its silences and blindness, and in its overdetermined pronouncements [...], in the paradoxes of the functioning of power”³⁴, the inner diversity of the category means that different reading strategies might be applied. Consequently, establishing “the authoritative truth of a text”³⁵ is not an ambition that subaltern studies pretend to pursue.

More recently, some researchers have expressed interest in an “along the grain” reading of colonial archives. They have shown that the extractive, recuperative, bottom-up approach encouraged by subaltern-studies historians is not the only methodological path to a renewed understanding of colonial categories of rule and more importantly of the exclusions they produced.³⁶ Marginal or subaltern voices are not necessarily located at the margins of institutional records. Ironically, even the most critical analyses which question the possibility of recovering the voices of silenced subalterns point to the recuperative model that has prevailed in the field as it reveals a “desire to add, to fill in the gaps”³⁷ in traditional historical narratives. In any case, “against” and “along” the grain readings are far from being incompatible approaches. As Josephine Hoegaerts demonstrates in this volume, they can be fruitfully combined to investigate the ways by which subalterns’ agency can be at the same time recorded and silenced.³⁸ In her contribution about children in nineteenth-century

³³ Inspired by the historical philosophy of Walter Benjamin to “brush history against the grain”. Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”, in *Illuminations*, New York, Schocken, 1969 [1940], p. 253-264.

³⁴ Gyan Prakash, “Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism”, in *The American Historical Review*, no. 99, 1994 (5), p. 1475-1490.

³⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Introduction. Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography”, in Ranajit Guha & Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (eds), *op. cit.*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 25.

³⁶ See mainly the work of Ann Laura Stoler who introduced the concept in her article “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance”, in *Archival Science*, no. 2, 2002, p. 87-109 and developed it in her book *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2009.

³⁷ Anjali Arondekar, “Without a Trace: Sexuality and the Colonial Archive”, in *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, no. 14, 2005 (1-2), p.13-14. See also Id., *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2009.

³⁸ For a recent reflection on the potential of such a combination, see Karen Vallgård, “Can the Subaltern Woman Run? Gender, Race and Agency in Colonial Missionary Texts”, in *Scandinavian Journal of History*, no. 39, 2014 (4), p. 472-486.

Belgium, Hoegaerts manages to mobilise in the same analytical framework archival material written *about* and *by* children. She reflects on both the audibility of these speeches (in documents produced by one of the most normative institutions with regard to childhood, namely the school) and on the actual echoes of children's voices and of what they might reveal "from the margins" about contemporary educational discourses and institutional representations of childhood. She also powerfully shows that not only adults but also children themselves played their part in the silencing enterprise visible in the archives, an argument that applies far beyond Hoegaerts' thematic scope. Investigating institutional sources as sites of the (bureaucratic) construction of power relations, conventions of rule and categories of difference should not prevent us from trying to identify the – albeit limited – spaces and expressions of subalterns' agency in the same documents. Yet, as second generation subaltern studies scholars remind us, the limits of the historical *genre*, both as an enterprise of knowledge and as a narrative, must be kept in mind in attempts to recover the words, experiences and truths of certain people and events.³⁹

The (methodological) tension that exists between the search for new kinds of sources and the renewed use or alternative approaches to familiar archives has long been around for historians of subaltern and marginal groups. For instance, the postcolonial and historical studies of "others" have built on older heuristic traditions. Since the 1960s, social (and later cultural) historians have mobilised new sources – whether visual, material, oral or associated with popular culture – in their attempts to uncover the experiences of those who had been marginalised because of their gender, race, class, sexuality or age.⁴⁰ The search for "authentic" voices and testimonies has been an explicit (and criticised) objective of those studies. The development of oral history – used in a complementary perspective or as a stand-alone method – has in particular appeared as a first-hand way of accessing (and recording) the "true" experiences, emotions and responses of dominated and minority groups as regards the

³⁹ See for instance the reflections on the Santal rebellion and its historiography as developed in Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 97-113. Initially, these reflections on the limits of historical science mainly concerned historicist ways of knowing and representing non-Western, "non-modern" experiences but they have since been fruitfully picked up by historians of the West, notably medievalists (see notably the special issue "Decolonizing the Middle Ages" of the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, no. 30, 2000 (3)) and antiquists (see Greg Anderson, "Retrieving the Lost Worlds of the Past: The Case for an Ontological Turn", in *The American Historical Review*, no. 120, 2015 (3), p.787-810.

⁴⁰ See the historiographical overview of Arlette Farge, "Marginalités", in Christian Delacroix, François Dosse, Patrick Garcia & Nicolas Offenstadt (eds), *Historiographies, I. Concepts et débats*, Paris, Gallimard, 2010, p. 491-502.

normative policies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁴¹ At the end of the 1970s, interest in oral resources and their methodological potentialities was reinforced by new attention devoted to the role and agency of individual and collective actors in social history.⁴² There is no doubt that oral history narratives have made it possible for historians to reconstruct the activities and worldviews of marginalised groups in unprecedented manners and therefore bring their perspectives to the study of social change at large. Nevertheless, it has also at times contributed to the reproduction of dual perspectives – margins vs. centre, resistance vs. domination – as well as to the essentialisation of the experiences of “others” and the alleged specific ways in which their histories could/should be interpreted.

The binary opposition between an elitist bourgeois textual culture and a subaltern non-literate world appears too simplistic if we want to comprehend not only the intrinsic diversity and contradictions of these categories but also their interactions.⁴³ Investigating poverty at the end of the 1980s, a historian aggrievedly underlined the difficulties he faced in trying to identify an “autonomous culture of the poor” in nineteenth-century Europe.⁴⁴ His assessment appears to still be relevant. The contributions to this special issue are driven by the conviction that the production of anti-hegemonic narratives by minorities and excluded groups can simultaneously offer vantage points onto their agencies, identities and senses of self, as well as perspectives on disciplinary government regulation, social control and the ways in which they shaped each other and bore potentialities for social transformation. Subaltern narratives and expressions contributed to the constant refashioning of the modern dynamics of inclusion/exclusion through the challenges they raised, despite normative constraints and filtered intelligibility. As Marnix Beyen demonstrates in his article, even the political registers of subalterns and parliamentary elites were never entirely distinct. In nineteenth-century Belgium, a foreign ex-convict deserter could be an agent involved in the process of parliamentary representation whose dynamic interaction with the sphere of formal state

⁴¹ The literature on oral history is extensive. See among others Paul Thomson, *The Voice of the Past*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977; Danièle Voldman (ed.), “La bouche de la vérité? La recherche historique et les sources orales”, special issue of *Cahiers de l'Institut d'Histoire du Temps Présent*, no. 21, 1992; Florence Descamps, *L'archiviste, l'historien et le magnétophone. De la constitution de la source orale à son exploitation*, Paris, CHEFF, 2001; Alistair Thomson, “Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History”, in *Oral History Review*, no. 34, 2007 (1), p. 49-70. In Belgium, oral history only started to develop in the 1980s despite the fact that the most prominent pioneer of this method was himself a Belgian (but also an Africanist). See Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, London, Routledge, 1965.

⁴² On some of the last decades’ challenges concerning social history, see Alain Prost, “Où va l'histoire sociale?”, in *Le Mouvement Social*, no. 174, 1996, and the special issue of the *Journal of Social History*, no. 37, 2003 (1).

⁴³ Pamela Cox, “Récits d'exclus en Angleterre (vers 1900)”, in André Gueslin & Dominique Kalifa (eds.), *Les exclus en Europe 1830-1930*, Paris, Editions de l'Atelier, 1999, p. 38-48.

⁴⁴ Stuart Woolf, *The Poor in Western Europe in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, London and New York, Methuen, 1987, p. 39.

politics cannot be reduced to “coping strategies” nor to the paradigm of “resistance”. The petition letters that embodied these exchanges testify to the engagement of marginalised individuals in formal bureaucratic dialogues and procedures.

Historians of subordinate categories of people have been at the forefront of research on “ordinary writing” since the end of the 1980s when feminist scholars revealed how these sources can shed light on women’s self-representation and identity formation. As such, they constitute “archives for an alternative history”.⁴⁵ These documents can inform historians about how “common people” voiced their concerns and help them access not only subalterns’ mentalities and sensibilities more directly than through elite material, but also indicate how they navigated the dominant social norms of their times. Although little explored in Belgian historiography,⁴⁶ this broad and diverse *genre* (from diaries to love letters, and from bureaucratic correspondence to transactional records) is opening up new avenues of research about marginals and subalterns, especially for historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁴⁷ In the words of Ursula Howard, “through writing they could become historical actors, and their complex writing defies the generalizations about lives of uniformity or passive victimhood.”⁴⁸

Marginality and Subalternity in Contemporary Belgian History

If we take a panoramic view of the scientific literature on persons or phenomena situated at the edge or outside of hegemonic power structures, discourses or customs, we can see that there has been a steady increase in academic interest in the history of marginality and

⁴⁵ Martyn Lyons, *The Writing Culture of Ordinary People in Europe, c.1860-1920*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 19. On “ordinary writings” as historical sources, see also Id. (ed.), *Ordinary Writings, Personal Narratives: Writing Practices in 19th and Early 20th Century Europe*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2007, the special issues published by the *International Review of Social History*, no. 46, 2001 and *Annales. Histoire, sciences sociales*, no. 56, 2001 (4-5). Significantly, scholars of the non-European world have been pioneers in the analysis of these sources (while being little credited by historians of Western countries); see for instance Karin Barber (ed.), *Africa’s Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2006.

⁴⁶ A few exceptions are: Maarten Van Genderachter, “Public Transcripts of Royalism. Pauper Letters to the Belgian Royal Family (1880- 1940)”, in Gita Deneckere and Jeroen Deploige (eds.), *Mystifying the Monarch: Studies on Discourse, Power and History*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2006, pp. 223-234; Bart De Sutter and Maarten Van Genderachter, “Working-class Voices from the Late Nineteenth Century: ‘Propaganda Pence’ in a Socialist Paper in Ghent”, in *History Workshop*, no. 69, 2010, p. 133-145. For a reflection on the Belgian colonial context, see Amandine Lauro, “‘J’ai l’honneur de porter plainte contre ma femme’. Litiges conjugaux et administration coloniale au Congo Belge (1930-1960)”, in *Clio. Histoire, femmes et sociétés*, no. 33, 2011, p. 65-84.

⁴⁷ Literacy rates increased spectacularly during that period in Western Europe (including Belgium), and writing became more and more central among the techniques of rule employed by modern European states.

⁴⁸ Ursula Howard, *Literacy and the Practice of Writing in the 19th Century: A Strange Blossoming of Spirit*, Leicester, National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, 2012, p. 3.

subalternity since the last decades of the twentieth century. Yet even though Belgian and foreign scholars have increasingly paid attention to “others”, or perhaps it would be better to say “to the construction of otherness”, the field remains under-researched and there are only a handful of studies in that regard. Moreover, while social scientists abroad have had no trouble using these notions in their academic publications and courses,⁴⁹ Belgian scholars seem to be wary of placing their analyses within the scope of marginality or subalternity.⁵⁰ Admittedly, these concepts remain vague and do not always explain the actual effects of policies of differentiation on target populations.⁵¹ In our view, however, they are useful analytical tools that can provide both a top-down (discourses and policies) and a bottom-up (subaltern groups’ experiences and strategies of resistance) perspective on the making of marginality, both past and present. Perhaps in a way that is more straightforward than the history-from-below approach, this research perspective stresses the “dialectical relationship between centre and margins”.⁵²

As argued earlier in this essay, we treat marginality as a social construction that makes it possible for elites to gain/retain control over societal groups which are perceived as being (potential) threats and transforms them into subalterns symbolising those who have no access to power structures or who refuse to accept subscribed norms. Marginalisation can thus be seen as a (temporary) tool which aims for the (re-)education and (re-)integration of subalterns in a hegemonic culture which is by no means an egalitarian one. In this sense, “the history of marginality is more than the history of deviant behaviour.”⁵³ Or as Belgian sociologist C. L. Kruithof argues, marginalisation is a functional process which seeks to maintain a social equilibrium.⁵⁴ Typically, social categories that are viewed as subordinate or unproductive (the

⁴⁹ To name but a few examples: Jean-Claude Schmidt, “L’histoire des marginaux”, in Jacques Le Goff, Roger Chartier and Jacques Revel, eds., *La nouvelle histoire*, Paris, 1978, p. 344-369; Russell Fergusson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha and Cornel West, eds., *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, Cambridge, MA, 1999, p. 446; Eric Tagliacozzo’s history course at Cornell University “Peddlers, Pirates and Prostitutes: Subaltern Histories of South-East Asia, 1800-1900”,

http://courses.cornell.edu/preview_course_nopop.php?catoid=18&coid=250850 (accessed 15 February 2016).

⁵⁰ Rare examples are the special issue of *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education*, no. 26, 1990 (2), which was devoted to marginalisation and institutionalisation in the history of education in Belgium and the Netherlands, and Eliane Gubin, *Norme et marginalités: comportements féminins au 19e et 20e siècles*, Bruxelles, 1991, p. 192.

⁵¹ Caldeira, “Marginality, Again?!”; Del Pilar and Udasco, “Marginality Theory: The Lack of Construct Validity”.

⁵² Shafqat Hussain, *A History of Marginality: Nature and Culture in the Western Himalayas*, PhD dissertation, Yale University, 2009, p. 462.

⁵³ Jeroen J. H. Dekker, “The Fragile Relation between Normality and Marginality: Marginalization and Institutionalization in the History of Education”, *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education*, no. 26, 1990 (2), p. 12-29.

⁵⁴ C. L. Kruithof, “The Control over Marginality: Structural Integration of Ambiguity”, *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education*, no. 26, 1990 (2), p. 31-47.

urban poor, migrants, women, children, the elderly, beggars, and so on), or those who do not abide by the rules (foreign and local prostitutes, deserters, rebellious youngsters, peddlers, homosexuals, drug dealers, etc.) are kept away from policy-making or wealth-distribution processes and at the same time kept in check, “rehabilitated” or outright repressed so that the (patriarchal) order will not be disturbed.

In their classic work on social politics in Western Europe, Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly argued that the early seventeenth century witnessed the emergence of authorities’ views of the proletariat’s recalcitrant behaviour as an endemic disease. Elites’ preoccupation with social disorder resulted in public and private interventions seeking to control the masses.⁵⁵ Beginning in the early 1800s, a concurrent belief in Western civilisation and a fear of decay led to the establishment of more strict boundaries between “normal” and “abnormal” behaviour. For instance, prostitution was tolerated (although not necessarily respected) and even regulated as a form of work in various European cities in the medieval and early-modern periods, but it increasingly came to be viewed as a social ill that demanded strict control or repression in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁵⁶ While fear is timeless and universal, it can be argued that the radical changes provoked by proletarianisation, pauperisation and increased urbanisation exacerbated the anxiety of the political, religious and intellectual elites who worried about the excesses and side effects of modern life.⁵⁷ Anything that did not conform to the norm caused fear and prompted interventions, including “improprieties” such as idleness, wanton behaviour, crime, sexual deviancy, broken families, drug consumption, unhealthy or tattooed bodies, unusual facial structures or the increased mobility of men and women within and across national borders. Cities were perceived as “cancerous sites *par excellence*”,⁵⁸ as they concentrated all the “evils” that posed a threat to the nation and to the race.

Around the same time, liberal and socialist thinkers contributed to the marginalisation of certain groups by promoting utilitarian ideas and exclusionary concepts of labour. Writing in the 1830s, French nobleman Adolphe Granier de Cassagnac divided the working class into four groups, “the workers, the beggars, the thieves and the public women”, implying that only

⁵⁵ Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, “Proletariseren en sociale politiek”, in Catharina Lis, Hugo Soly and Dirk Van Damme, *Op vrije voeten? Sociale politiek in West-Europa (1450-1914)*, Leuven, 1985, p. 39-127.

⁵⁶ Magaly Rodríguez García, “Ideas and Practices of Prostitution Around the World”, in Paul Knepper and Anja Johansen, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Crime and Criminal Justice*, New York, 2016, p. 132-154.

⁵⁷ Frédéric Chauvaud, ed., *L’ennemie intime. La peur: perceptions, expressions, effets*, Rennes, 2011, p. 288.

⁵⁸ Liesbet Nys, Henk De Smaele, Jo Tollebeek and Kaat Wils, “Een medisch object. Veranderingen in menswetenschap, cultuur en politiek”, in Id., eds., *De zieke natie. Over de medicalisering van de samenleving, 1860-1914*, Groningen, 2002, p. 10-20, 18.

the first category were “real” workers.⁵⁹ The Communist League also articulated the desire of “respectable” and “free” workers (meaning male wage earners) to distinguish themselves from slaves and other unfree labourers, the self-employed and the *lumpenproletariat*. And although Karl Marx seems to have been rather ambiguous about prostitutes and their relation vis-à-vis the working class,⁶⁰ most nineteenth-century commentators in Belgium and abroad defined survival activities such as prostitution, begging or peddling as unproductive, work-shy, deviant or even criminal.⁶¹

Belgian historians have used a variety of approaches to analyse processes of marginalisation. Social historians seem to have been the first to focus on the policies of othering. An early exponent of the nineteenth-century pathologisation of sexuality was Jos Van Ussel, whose (1968) Marxist-Freudian history of the “sexual problem” emphasised the modern socio-economic context in Western Europe. His research established a link between the “anti-sexual syndrome” and capitalist-bourgeois morals, with a focus on productivity and social order based on stable family life (marriage and reproduction of a healthy labour force). Van Ussel’s work on the anti-masturbation campaign inspired other historians in subsequent decades.⁶² Jean Stengers’s and Anne Van Neck’s *Histoire d’une grande peur* became more popular through its translation into English but in contrast to the French and Anglo-American cultural approach to the history of sexuality, it remained within the boundaries of traditional social history.⁶³ The authors’ emphasis on the role played by the individual (Samuel Tissot)

⁵⁹ In his view, “...the worker is a proletarian, because he works in order to live and earns a wage; the beggar is a proletarian, who does not want to work or cannot work, and begs in order to live; the thief is a proletarian, who does not want to work or beg, and, in order to make a living, steals; the prostitute is a proletarian, who neither wants to work, nor beg, nor steal, and, in order to live, sells her body.” Adolphe Granier de Cassagnac, *Histoire des classes ouvrières et des classes bourgeoises*, Paris, 1838, p. 30. See also, Jan Lucassen, “Writing Global Labour History c. 1800-1940: A Historiography of Concepts, Periods and Geographical Scope”, in Id., ed., *Global Labour History: A State of the Art*, Bern, 2008, p. 39-90.

⁶⁰ As Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World: Essays towards a Global Labour History*, Leiden, 2008, p. 22, footnote 15 noted, “When Marx discusses the relative surplus population in *Capital*, he regards prostitutes as an important part of the ‘actual lumpenproletariat’ (*Capital*, I, p. 797). Elsewhere, especially in the *Theories of Surplus Value*, I, pp. 166 and 186, Marx says that prostitutes, if they work for a brothel keeper, perform (unproductive) wage labor, like actors or musicians, and thus are, by implication, part of the proletariat in the narrow sense of the word.”

⁶¹ Anneke Geyzen, “Marchands ambulants, réglementation et police à Bruxelles au XIXe siècle”, *Le Mouvement Social*, no. 238, janvier-mars, 2012, p. 53-64; Serge Jaumain, “Un métier oublié: le colporteur dans la Belgique du XIXe siècle”, *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis/Revue belge d’histoire contemporaine*, no. 16, 1985 (3-4), p. 307-356; Sebastian Conrad, *et. al.*, “Die Kodifizierung der Arbeit: Individuum, Gesellschaft, Nation”, in Jürgen Kocka and Claus Offe (eds), *Geschichte und Zukunft der Arbeit*, Frankfurt, 1999, p. 449-475; van der Linden, *Workers of the World*, p. 10, 266-268.

⁶² Jos Van Ussel, *Geschiedenis van het seksuele probleem*, Meppel-Boom, 1968. Soon after its 1968 publication, Van Ussel’s work was translated into German, Italian, French, Spanish and Portuguese. See also: Id., *Een sociologisch fenomeen: de bestrijding van de masturbatie*, s. l., 1968, p. 60.

⁶³ Jean Stengers and Anne Van Neck, *Histoire d’une grande peur: la masturbation*, Bruxelles, 1984, p. 232, translated into English by Kathryn Hoffmann, *Masturbation: The History of a Great Terror*, New York, 2001, p. 239. For a critical review of the works on the history of sexuality by Jos Van Ussel, Chris Vandembroeke and

and their neglect of the contemporary social values that influenced the development of anti-masturbation theories resulted in critical assessments of the book.⁶⁴

Starting in the early 1990s, other research perspectives entered the field of the history of sexuality.⁶⁵ Under the influence of feminist, post-colonial and LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) studies, as well as the cultural turn, an increased interest in sexual orientation and gender identity in historical perspectives became apparent. Rudi Bleys' research on the representation of non-Western patterns of same-sex desire and its relation to the modern construction of homosexual identity was perhaps the first work in Belgium to focus on discourses concerning sexual categories. As such, it was an important contribution to the historiography of Western constructions of cultural and sexual otherness and to the history of homosexuality in general.⁶⁶ Furthermore, narratives that situate the origins of a European "modern sexual regime" (with its alignment between sexual orientation and personal identity as well as the emergence of the homo/hetero binary) in the nineteenth century have been challenged by other young scholars. Wannes Dupont's doctoral research demonstrates that there was a striking absence of a discursive preoccupation with homosexuality in Belgium until the 1950s. His study of this "Belgian paradox" rejects the idea of a homogenised West as well as orientalist views which place the "modern" and "rational" West in stark contrast to the "archaic" and "intuitive" East.⁶⁷

All this, however, does not mean that recent Belgian research on the history of homosexuality has remained focused on discourses, nor that pre-1950 Belgium was an earthly paradise for homosexuals. In a fascinating short essay on the harbour as a "sexual heterotopia", Henk de Smaele establishes a link between cultural and social history, and he portrays harbours as spaces of otherness in which homoerotic fantasies meet real same-sex

Michel Foucault, see Wannes Dupont and Henk De Smaele, "Orakelen over heimelijkheid. Seksualiteit en historiografie in Belgisch perspectief", in *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis/Revue belge d'histoire contemporaine*, no. 38, 2008 (3-4), p. 273-276.

⁶⁴ Lesley A. Hall, "Review of 'Masturbation: The History of a Great Terror'", *The American Historical Review*, no. 107, 2002 (3), p. 849-850; Crispin Barker, "Masturbation: The History of a Great Terror (review)", *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, no. 60, 2005 (1), p. 111-112.

⁶⁵ A nice example of this new trend is the special issue on the contemporary history of sexuality in Belgium edited by Wannes Dupont and Henk de Smaele, "Hedendaagse geschiedenis van de seksualiteit in België/L'histoire contemporaine de la sexualité en Belgique", *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis/Revue belge d'histoire contemporaine*, no. 38, 2008 (3-4).

⁶⁶ Rudi C. Bleys, *The Geography of Perversion: Male-to-Male Sexual Behaviour Outside the West and the Ethnographic Imagination, 1750-1918*, New York, 1996, p. 480.

⁶⁷ Wannes Dupont, "Modernités et sexualités belges", in *Cahiers d'histoire*, no. 119, Avril-Juin, 2012, p. 19-34; Id., *Free-Floating Evils. A Genealogy of Homosexuality in Belgium*, PhD dissertation, University of Antwerp, 2015, p. 535.

encounters.⁶⁸ Case studies on homosexual life in nineteenth-century Brussels conclude that the local police kept an eye on *les bas-fonds* or shadowy places where “infamous” men met and that same-sex relationships were considered abnormal.⁶⁹ Belgian law, however, did not criminalise homosexuality until the 1960s, so unless they disturbed public order or were accused of sexual assault, homosexuals had some leeway and remained at the edge of the permissible.⁷⁰ According to Dupont, “so-called *pédérastes* were free-floating evils rather than a well-defined and closely scrutinised subaltern category of individuals”.⁷¹

Indeed, Belgian authorities and reformers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries seem to have prioritised other kinds of subaltern groups and behaviour. Since the late 1980s, a growing number of social and legal historians have taken up the policies and institutional arrangements aimed at the monitoring and exclusion of undesirable persons as well as the profiles, experiences and (self-)perceptions of the persons concerned. Beyond an increased interest in the history of (labour) migration and calls for further research on exclusionary relief policies targeting migrants,⁷² historians have challenged and nuanced the notion of Belgium as a *terre d'accueil* for political immigrants. While Anne Morelli (and later on Franck Caestecker and Nicolas Coupain) questioned the reputation of Belgian hospitality with quantitative and qualitative research on the country's expulsion policies, Idesbald Goddeeris nuanced her critique by shifting the focus of analysis from the authorities to the refugees themselves.⁷³ Through an analysis of the perceptions of the guest country among Polish immigrants, Goddeeris concluded that in spite of legal restrictions (especially in the

⁶⁸ Henk de Smaele, “De haven als natte droom. Matrozen en havenbuurten in de homo-erotische beleving”, in Hilde Greefs and Ilja Van Damme, eds., *In behouden haven. Liber Amicorum Greta Devos. Reflecties over maritieme regio's*, Tiel, 2009, p. 447-463.

⁶⁹ For the construction of masculine identity and citizenship in Belgium, see Josephine Hoegaerts, *Masculinity and Nationhood, 1830-1910: Constructions of Identity and Citizenship in Belgium*, New York, 2014, p. 256.

⁷⁰ Wannes Dupont, “Les ‘trous’ de Bruxelles: Les lieux de rencontres homosexuelles au 19e siècle”, in *Les Cahiers de la Fonderie: Revue d'histoire sociale et industrielle de la région bruxelloise*, no. 44, 2011, p. 47-53; Id., “Pederasten op de Place Royale. Een fragment uit het vergeten verleden van Brussel”, in *Leidschrift*, no. 26, 2011 (1), p. 79-91; Nicholas Chartier, “De onderbuik van Brussel. De mannelijke homoseksuele subcultuur in Brussel tijdens de negentiende eeuw”, in *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis/Revue belge d'histoire contemporaine*, no. 38, 2008 (3-4), p. 407-435.

⁷¹ Wannes Dupont, “Free-Floating Evils: The History of Homosexuality in Belgium”, paper presented at the workshop “Marginals and Subalterns in Belgium: A Historical Perspective (19th – 20th Centuries)”, Université libre de Bruxelles, 2 July 2014.

⁷² See e.g. Anne Winter, “Eigen armen eerst? Migranten en de toegang tot armenzorg in Antwerpen, ca. 1840-1900”, in Margo De Koster, Bert De Munck, Hilde Greefs, Bart Willems and Anne Winter, eds., *Werken aan de Stad. Stedelijke actoren en structuren in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden, 1500-1900*, Brussels, 2011, p. 135-155.

⁷³ Anne Morelli, “Belgique, terre d'accueil? Rejet et accueil des exilés politiques en Belgique de 1830 à nos jours”, in *L'émigration politique en Europe aux XIXe et XXe siècles. Actes du colloque de Rome (3-8 mars 1988)*, Rome, 1991, p. 117-128; Franck Caestecker, *Alien Policy in Belgium, 1840-1940: The Creation of Guest Workers, Refugees and Illegal Aliens*, New York and Oxford, 2000, p. 352; Ellen Debackere, “The Expulsion of Foreigners: The Case of Nineteenth-Century Antwerp”, paper presented at the workshop “Marginals and Subalterns in Belgium: A Historical Perspective (19th – 20th Centuries)”, Université libre de Bruxelles, 2 July 2014.

political sphere), newcomers saw a number of advantages that made Belgium attractive, for example the low cost of living, its strategic position near France and England, the use of French, the presence of migrant networks, and for the Polish military, recruitment into the Belgian army.⁷⁴ Similarly, Coupain's research proposes a more nuanced reading of Belgian hospitality. He argues that the application of the migration policies of the long nineteenth century varied according to the political behaviour and socio-economic position of the migrants in question. Vagrancy, begging or lack of means of subsistence were among the most common reasons given by the authorities for the expulsion of migrants, even though these were often used as an excuse to get rid of unwelcome political migrants.⁷⁵

The growing preoccupation across Europe with rootless, homeless and unemployed (young) people starting in the latter part of the nineteenth century has also received some scholarly attention in Belgium since the late 1980s. And here, too, a shift in perspective can be seen. Wim Depreeuw's work on vagabondage, begging and homelessness provides a detailed but primarily legal-institutional analysis of the repression and confinement of "dangerous" persons.⁷⁶ The role played by key political actors in the introduction of measures against vagabondage has been further analysed by criminologist Stef Christiaensen in his work on the life and work of Jules Lejeune, the Minister of Justice (1887-1894).⁷⁷ Following the example of young established scholars from Belgium and abroad,⁷⁸ new research on vagrancy and begging is being conducted at Belgian universities. While interest in the socio-economic context and the political and legal frameworks remains, more attention is now being

⁷⁴ Idesbald Goddeeris, "'Belgique - terre d'accueil'. Perceptie en attractiviteit van België als gastland bij Poolse politieke migranten (1831-1846)", *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis/Revue belge d'histoire contemporaine*, no. 29, 1999 (3-4), p. 261-314.

⁷⁵ Nicolas Coupain, "L'expulsion des étrangers en Belgique (1830-1914)", *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis/Revue belge d'histoire contemporaine*, no. 33, 2003 (1-2), p. 5-48.

⁷⁶ Wim Depreeuw, *Landloperij, bedelarij en thuisloosheid. Een socio-historische analyse van repressie, bijstand en instellingen*, Antwerpen, 1988, p. 620.

⁷⁷ Stef Christiaensen, *Tussen klassieke en moderne criminele politiek. Leven en beleid van Jules Lejeune*, Leuven, 2004, p. 745. Parliamentary debates on the "vagabondage threat" are also briefly discussed in Donald Weber, *Homo criminalis. Belgische parlementsleden over misdaad en strafrecht, 1830-1940*, Brussel, 1996, p. 190.

⁷⁸ Among others: Lis, Soly and Van Damme, *Op vrije voeten?*, p. 240; Anne Winter, "Vagrancy as an Adaptive Strategy: The Duchy of Brabant, 1767-1776", in *International Review of Social History*, no. 49, 2004, (2), p. 249-277; A. L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England, 1560-1640*, London, 1985, p. 233; Tim Hitchcock, *Down and Out in Eighteenth-Century London*, London, 2004, p. 343; Id., "A New History from Below", *History Workshop Journal*, no. 57, 2004, p. 294-298; Richard Dyson and Steven King, "'The Streets are Paved with Idle Beggars': Experiences and Perceptions of Beggars in Nineteenth Century Oxford", in Beate Althammer, ed., *Bettler in der europäischen Stadt der Moderne. Zwischen Barmherzigkeit, Repression und Sozialreform*, Frankfurt am Main, 2007, p. 59-89; A. L. Beier and Paul Ocobock, eds., *Cast Out. Vagrancy and Homelessness in Global and Historical Perspective*, Athens, OH, 2008, p. 396; Sigrid Wadauer, "Establishing Distinctions: Unemployment versus Vagrancy in Austria from the Late Nineteenth Century to 1938", in *International Review of Social History*, no. 56, 2011 (1), p. 31-70. Recent non-academic publications by Suzanna Jansen and Wil Schackmann in the Netherlands and Toon Horsten in Belgium also contributed to the popularisation of the theme.

paid to the micro level, that is to say the lifecycles, motivations, self-perceptions and agency of persons suspected and possibly accused of vagrancy or begging.

The rich archives of the Belgian “benevolent colonies” – or more accurately “correction houses” – were explored by some history students in the early 2000s but a more systematic and holistic approach can be found in Rik Vercammen’s recent doctoral dissertation.⁷⁹ He concludes that the epithets “vagrant” or “beggar” were legal constructions used randomly by the local authorities for a wide range of persons who did not conform to the norm and also by men who took the initiative and handed themselves over to the local police.⁸⁰ Not mobility but a lack of social embeddedness in family, labour or neighbourhood networks was the authorities’ main argumentation for conviction. Furthermore, there seems to have been a significant number of persons who saw in the state structures a temporal solution to harsh living conditions.⁸¹ Vercammen argues that while the two-fold objective of the correction houses was to protect society from the “*caractère contagieux*”⁸² of vagrancy and begging and to teach inmates discipline and work ethics, there is no indication in the individual dossiers that confirms the stereotype of the menacing, wandering and work-shy vagrant or beggar.

Nevertheless, the vague definition of these social categories gave the authorities considerable leeway. As researchers working on the history of crime, criminal justice and prostitution have shown, state and non-state actors applied the anti-vagrancy law and its disciplinary stipulations to a wide range of subaltern groups. Inspired perhaps by the research conducted abroad on the fear caused by “dangerous” social groups in nineteenth-century European societies,⁸³ a strong tradition of historical-criminological investigation was built up in Belgium starting in the late 1980s. Members of the Centre d’Histoire du Droit et de la

⁷⁹ Rik Vercammen, *Leven aan de rafelrand. Landlopers en bedelaars in Belgische Rijksweldadigheidskolonies (1870-1930)*, PhD dissertation, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, 2014, p. 415.

⁸⁰ For a comparative analysis of the complex selection process, arrests and possible convictions, as well as the role played by the local authorities, see Rik Vercammen and Vicky Vanruysseveldt, “Van centraal beleid naar lokale praktijk. Het ‘probleem’ van landloperij en bedelarij in België (1890-1910)”, in *Journal of Belgian History*, no. 45, 2015 (1), p. 120-161.

⁸¹ For analyses of confinement upon request in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, “Familiale en maatschappelijke (in)tolerantiedrempels. Een historisch perspectief: opsluiting op verzoek in de 18e eeuw”, in Carl Alexander and Serge Gutwirth, eds., *Te gek voor recht? De geesteszieke tussen recht en psychiatrie*, Gent, 1997, p. 1-17; Jenneke Christiaens, “Alle gekheid in een hoekje! Verzoeken tot opsluiting in de vroege negentiende eeuw”, in Alexander and Gutwirth, *Te gek voor recht?*, p. 19-36.

⁸² M. A. Visart, “Rapport fait à la Chambre des représentants, au nom de la commission”, *Pasinomie* 26 (1891), p. 452, quoted in Rik Vercammen, “Een groot ‘bedrijf’ in een klein dorp? De ‘verstedelijking’ van de Rijksweldadigheidskolonie te Merksplas”, in De Koster, et al., *Werken aan de Stad*, p. 157-171, 161.

⁸³ To name but a few: Louis Chevalier, *Classes laborieuses, classes dangereuses à Paris pendant la première moitié du XIXe siècle*, Paris, p. 566; Michelle Perrot, “Quand la société prend peur de sa jeunesse en France au XIXe siècle”, in *Les jeunes et les autres. Contributions des sciences de l’homme à la question de jeunes*, Vauresson, 1986, p. 19-27.

Justice of the Université catholique de Louvain as well as of the History and Criminology departments of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel have produced a large body of literature on youth delinquency and “deviant” sexual behaviour. Marie-Sylvie Dupont-Bouchat’s prolific work has focused primarily on key nineteenth-century reformers and institutions (youth penitentiaries and *écoles de bienfaisance*), the construction of social categories (“*la jeunesse dangereuse*” and “children at risk”), the development of strategies to deal with youth delinquency (from punishment to rehabilitation/education) and societal views on stigmatised activities such as prostitution.⁸⁴ Also, while Jenneke Christiaens’ doctoral research retained a focus on the legal normative framework that led to the “invention” of youth delinquency in the nineteenth century, it did devote a chapter to the crucial role played by science in the redefinition and pathologisation of delinquent children starting in the early 1900s.⁸⁵ The involvement of “experts” in the construction of juvenile violence as a social problem has been more thoroughly explored in recent years. In a bilingual volume that covers various parts of the world, editors Aurore François, Veerle Massin and David Niget gathered the work of researchers dealing with the increasing power of expertise and its intervention in the development of public policies for the treatment of “irregular youth” from the nineteenth century to the present.⁸⁶

In the new millennium, researchers working on gender and feminist studies have also been involved in the study of juvenile delinquency – or the fear thereof – and juvenile justice in Belgium. The gendered logic of the public authorities and reformers and the making of the female delinquent by the end of the nineteenth century, as well as the social background, experiences and self-perceptions of girls detained and possibly convicted in Antwerp in the period of time leading up to the mid-1900s, formed the core of Margo De Koster’s doctoral research. More recently, she has made other important contributions to our knowledge of the

⁸⁴ See, among others, Marie-Sylvie Dupont-Bouchat, *De la prison à l'école. Les pénitenciers pour enfants en Belgique au XIXe siècle (1840-1914)*, Heule, 1996, p. 350; Id., “La prostitution urbaine. La marginalité intégrée”, in Eliane Gubin and Jean-Pierre Nandrin, eds., *La ville et les femmes en Belgique. Histoire et sociologie*, Bruxelles, 1993, p. 97-129; Id., “Tolérance et répression. Fascination et répulsion. Regards croisés sur la prostitution en Belgique (XVe-XXe siècle)”, in *Des étuves aux eros centers. Prostitution et traite des femmes du moyen âge à nos jours. Van badhuis tot eroscentrum. Prostitutie en mensenhandel van de middeleeuwen tot heden*, Bruxelles, 1995, 51-87. For a recent compilation of her work, see: Id., *La Belgique criminelle. Droit, justice, société (XIVème-XXème siècles)*, Louvain-la-Neuve, 2006, p. 531.

⁸⁵ Jenneke Christiaens, *De geboorte van de jeugd delinquent*, Brussels, 1999, p. 430.

⁸⁶ Aurore François, Veerle Massin and David Niget, eds., *Violences juvéniles sous expertise(s) XIXe-XXIe siècles-Expertise and Juvenile Violence 19th-21st Century*, Louvain-la-Neuve, 2011, p. 310. For a general overview of violence and juvenile delinquency, see Xavier Rousseaux and Veerle Massin, “Violence et délinquance juvéniles dans la longue durée historique”, in Laurent Mucchielli, ed., *La délinquance des jeunes*, Paris, 2014, p. 13-24. For the influence of war on judicial and institutional approaches to youth delinquency, see Aurore François, *Guerres et délinquance juvénile (1912-1950). Un demi-siècle de pratiques judiciaires et institutionnelles envers de mineurs en difficulté*, PhD dissertation, Université catholique de Louvain, 2008, p. 439.

survival strategies of female beggars and vagrants, and of the transgressive uses of urban public spaces by youths.⁸⁷ Following a similar approach, although with less of a focus on young persons themselves, Christine Machiels and David Niget have traced the origins of the fear of female deviancy and linked it to the moral panic that swept across the Western world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. William Stead's newspaper article about the abduction of English girls who were then purportedly sold to brothels in Brussels and the attention given to violence against women in the European and American press of the late 1800s rendered all men suspect and strengthened the notions of urban danger and female fragility.⁸⁸ Since that period, the idea of the fallen woman acquired a double meaning: it could refer to sinful or unruly behaviour for which she was responsible, but also to situations of vulnerability in which women fell prey to malevolent men. In both cases, women's bodies – particularly those of young females – came to represent a moral and physical threat to society, a situation that called for strict vigilance. After the Second World War, fear of social “maladjustment” and of female rebellion became more prominent, but anxiety about and condemnation of “abnormal” female sexual behaviour did not disappear altogether.⁸⁹

The contribution of the Belgian feminist movement to the idea of the victimisation of prostitutes and to transnational politics for the regulation of sexuality between the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century has been thoroughly analysed by Christine Machiels in her doctoral research. Her vertical and horizontal comparative approach (on the one hand between the national and international levels, and on the other between three European countries) unveils not only the discourses, strategies and tensions within the international feminist lobby but also the emancipatory *and* perverse effects of its moral crusade.⁹⁰ Sociologist Jean-Michel Chaumont also devoted years of intensive research to the white slavery panic in Belgium and abroad, as well as to its institutionalisation at the

⁸⁷ Margo De Koster, *Weerbaar, weerspannig of crimineel? Meisjes en jonge vrouwen tussen emancipatie en delinquentie tijdens de eerste helft van de twintigste eeuw*, PhD dissertation, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, 2003, p. 287; Id., Marian Weevers and Catrien C. J. H. Bijleveld, “Swept up from the Streets or Nowhere Else to Go? The Journeys of Dutch Female Beggars and Vagrants to the Oegstgeest State Labor Institution in the Late Nineteenth Century”, in *Journal of Social History*, no. 46, 2012 (2), p. 416-429; Id. and Herbert Reinke, “Geheimen van jongeren. De Antwerpse jeugd en haar nachtleven in de vroege twintigste eeuw”, in *Tijdschrift over cultuur & criminaliteit*, no. 2, 2012, p. 32-46.

⁸⁸ Judith Walkowitz, “Jack the Ripper and the Myth of Male Violence”, in *Feminist Studies*, no. 8, 1982 (3), p. 542-574; Donna Guy, *White Slavery and Mothers Alive and Dead: The Troubled Meeting of Sex, Gender, Public Health, and Progress in Latin America*, Lincoln, NE, 2000, p. 216.

⁸⁹ David Niget, “Dangereuses victimes. La peur de jeunes filles ‘irrégulières’ de la Traite des blanches à l’invention des neuroleptiques (Belgique, 1880-1960)”, in Chauvaud, *L’ennemie intime*, p. 176-190; Christine Machiels and David Niget, *Protection de l’enfance et paniques morales*, Bruxelles, 2012, p. 58. See also Gubin, *Norme et marginalités*, *op. cit.*

⁹⁰ Christine Machiels, *Les féminismes face à la prostitution aux XIXe et XXe siècles (Belgique, France, Suisse)*, PhD dissertation, Université catholique de Louvain & Université d’Angers, 2011, p. 431.

international level starting in the early 1900s. In his meticulous study of the League of Nations' campaign against the traffic in women and children (1924-27), he analysed the role played by Belgian and other foreign "experts" in "*la fabrication d'un fléau*".⁹¹ Although Magaly Rodríguez García's postdoctoral research has somewhat nuanced Chaumont's findings by following more closely the evolution and dynamics of the debates within the League in the 1920s and '30s, the conclusion that state and non-state actors in Geneva were largely responsible for the continuous marginalisation of sex workers and the stigmatisation of prostitution remains.⁹²

For its part, the history of prostitution in Belgium started receiving much more attention in the early 1980s, but this field of research is also fragmented.⁹³ Because of the crucial role played by the local authorities in the gendered repression or regulation of the sex trade, much of the historical debate has focused on the discourses and policies of Belgian municipalities in the north and south of the country and on female prostitution.⁹⁴ Perceptions of prostitution at the national level and among social workers, as well as the wartime policies and the occupation contexts that turned prostitutes into "double traitors" (to hegemonic morals and to the nation) have also been given considerable attention by Belgian scholars working in various disciplines.⁹⁵ Within the specific context of colonial rule, Amandine Lauro

⁹¹ Jean-Michel Chaumont and Christine Machiels, eds., *Du sordide au mythe. L'affaire de la traite de blanches (Bruxelles, 1880)*, Louvain-la-Neuve, 2009, p. 268; Jean-Michel Chaumont, *Le mythe de la traite des blanches. Enquête sur la fabrication d'un fléau*, Paris, 2009, p. 322.

⁹² Magaly Rodríguez García, "The League of Nations and the Moral Recruitment of Women", in *International Review of Social History*, no. 57, December 2012, p. 97-128; Id., "La Société des nations face à la traite des femmes et au travail sexuel à l'échelle mondiale", in *Le Mouvement Social*, no. 241, octobre-décembre 2012, p. 105-125. In cooperation with Mark Wyers, Rodríguez García is preparing a journal article on the campaigns for the rehabilitation of prostitutes and the prevention of prostitution in which the diverse points of view of national representatives to the League are analysed. Belgian delegate Isidore Maus' opposition to the eugenics discourse and the view of prostitutes as "feeble-minded" is notable.

⁹³ Judging by the number of master's theses that have been written on the topic since the last decades of the twentieth century, prostitution seems to be one of the favourite topics of history students. We are grateful to Sarah Aupert for her comprehensive historiographical overview of prostitution which she presented at the workshop "Marginals and Subalterns in Belgium. A Historical Perspective (19th – 20th Centuries)", Université libre de Bruxelles, 2 July 2014.

⁹⁴ See e.g. Sophie de Schaepdrijver, "Regulated Prostitution in Brussels, 1844-1877: A Policy and its Implementation", in *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, no. 37, 1986, p. 89-108; Catharina Lis, "Een politieel-medische orde: de reglementering van de prostitutie in West-Europa, in het bijzonder in Antwerpen, tijdens de eerste helft van de negentiende eeuw", in *L'initiative publique des communes en Belgique 1795-1940/Het openbaar initiatief van de gemeenten in België 1795-1940*, Brussel, no. 71, 1986, p. 559-579; Colette Huberty and Luc Keunings, "La prostitution à Bruxelles au dix-neuvième siècle", in *Les Cahiers de la Fonderie: Revue d'histoire sociale et industrielle de la région bruxelloise*, no. 2, 1987, p. 3-6. In his study on homosexuality in nineteenth-century Brussels, Nicolas Chartier devoted some pages to male prostitution but the theme remains under-researched. Chartier, "De onderbuik van Brussel", p. 417-422.

⁹⁵ Tina Van Loon, "Opvattingen, hulpverlening en wetgeving ten aanzien van prostitutie in België [1830-2007]", in *Ethiek & Maatschappij*, no. 13, 2010 (1), p. 104-126; Michèle Hirsch, "La répression de la prostitution et son exploitation en Belgique", in Pierre Van der Vorst, ed., *La prostitution: quarante ans après la Convention de New York*, Bruxelles, 1992, p. 75-120; Benoît Majerus, "La prostitution à Bruxelles pendant la Grande Guerre: contrôle et pratique", in *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés/Crime, History & Societies*, no. 7, 2003 (1), p. 5-42; Aurore

has provided a fascinating narrative of the shifting viewpoints on interracial relationships and the anxiety caused by indigenous prostitution. As such, her study is an important response to Ann Laura Stoler's call for the integration of sexuality in colonial history.⁹⁶

Since the latter part of the twentieth century, the growth of the sex workers' movement has prompted a major shift in perceptions of prostitution and led to new research perspectives. While victimisation and a blatant disregard for prostitutes' voices persist in public debates, an increasing number of researchers are attempting to de-marginalise prostitution and place it within a broader socio-economic context.⁹⁷ Inspired by this new historiographical trend, doctoral candidates Sarah Auspert and Maja Mechant have integrated insights from migration studies, labour history and demography in their analyses of prostitution in the Southern Netherlands and Bruges in the second half of the eighteenth century. The migratory movements, social profiles and lifecycles of the women concerned, rather than policies and discourses on prostitution, are emphasised in this young research.⁹⁸

Beginning at the end of the 1990s, the theories and discourses that form the basis of modern ostracising social policies and attitudes towards non-hegemonic groups started to receive much more academic attention. The medicalisation of society and the vast range of ideas and practices that were encapsulated within the notion of "degeneration" have been studied in Belgium, first from a criminological and then, more thoroughly, from a cultural-historical perspective.⁹⁹ The results of a research project on the doctrine of degeneration in science and culture in Belgium coordinated by cultural historians from the University of

François, "Une véritable frénésie de jouissance'... Prostitution juvénile et armées d'occupation en Belgique (1940-1945)", in *Revue d'histoire de l'enfance "irrégulière"*, no. 10, 2008, p. 17-34. The latter appeared in a special issue (edited by Christine Machiels and Eric Pierre) of the same journal devoted to the prostitution of minors in the twentieth century.

⁹⁶ Amandine Lauro, *Coloniaux, ménagères et prostituées au Congo belge (1885-1930)*, Loverval, 2005, p. 264; Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*, Berkeley, 2002, p. 335.

⁹⁷ For the description of a research project coordinated by Magaly Rodríguez García, Lex Heerma van Voss and Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk on the history of prostitution analysed from a global-labour-history perspective, see <https://socialhistory.org/en/projects/selling-sex-city>. A compilation of the studies gathered within the scope of this project will be published in the course of 2016 in the Brill series *Studies in Global Social History*.

⁹⁸ Sarah Auspert, "La mobilité des prostituées avant l'instauration du régleментарisme. Prostitution, circulation et régulation dans l'espace 'belge' (1750-1795)", Université catholique de Louvain, FNRS-doctoral project; Maja Mechant, "Vrouwen met een uitzonderlijke overlevingsstrategie? De levenslopen van prostituees in Brugge, 1750-1790", Universiteit van Gent, FWO-doctoral project; Id., "Geboren en getogen in kwetsbaarheid? De familiale achtergronden van prostituees werkzaam in Brugge tijdens de achttiende eeuw", in Isabelle De Vos and Bart Van de Putte, eds., *Kwetsbare groepen in historische demografie*, Leuven, 2014, p. 47-69; Id., "The Social Profiles of Prostitutes", in Magaly Rodríguez García, Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk and Lex Heerma van Voss, eds., *Sex Sold in World Cities, 1600s-2000s*, forthcoming (manuscript proposed for publication to Brill).

⁹⁹ Cyrille Fijnaut, ed., *Gestalten uit het verleden. 32 voorgangers in de strafwetenschap, de strafrechtspleging en de criminologie*, Brussel, 1993, p. 347; Jo Tollebeek, Geert Vanpaemel and Kaat Wils, eds., *Degeneratie in België 1860-1940. Een geschiedenis van ideeën en praktijken*, Leuven, 2003, p. 319; Nys, de Smale, Tollebeek and Kaat Wils, eds., *De zieke natie...*, p. 414.

Leuven have been expanded upon not only in a number of academic publications but also through initiatives aimed at the broader public in cooperation with Museum Dr. Guislain.¹⁰⁰ The latter's curator, Patrick Allegaert, has played an important role in the popularisation of the history of psychiatry and in the perpetuation of the museum's core mission, which questions the distinction between the normal and abnormal.¹⁰¹

However, what the application of modern medical theories or degeneration discourses meant to past flesh-and-blood men and women has received only scant attention in Belgian historiography. As stated above, a growing interest in the lifecycles, opinions and eventual subversion of the persons concerned is clearly noticeable in recent research but their voices remain insufficiently heard. Benoît Majerus' recent essay on the experiences of psychiatric patients and their strategies for coping with hospitalisation (confinement inscribed within a context of social normativity, the creation of less alienating medical justifications and the internalisation of medical/psychiatric language) is therefore a welcome contribution to both the history of medicine and subaltern studies.¹⁰²

The bottom-up approach is also explicitly stressed in the research project "Justice & Populations: The Belgian Experience in International Perspective (1795 to the Present)". Notably, this broad interuniversity and interdisciplinary project includes social groups that have traditionally been part of historical or criminological analyses of deviance (e.g. female psychiatric patients or young offenders¹⁰³) and also populations that have hitherto remained outside the history of marginality and subalternity. Stigmatised groups such as "Wehrmacht children" or war collaborators have only recently been integrated into the historical metier.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Raf De Bont and Kaat Wils, "De meetbare misdadiger. Cesare Lombroso en de criminele antropologie in België", in *Karakterkoppen. Over haviksneuzen en hamsterwangen/Characteristic Faces: On Hawk Noses and Chipmunk Cheeks*, Tielt, 2015, p. 115-136.

¹⁰¹ Some well-done published examples of the museum's work on "others" and the stigma surrounding them include: *Nerveuze vrouwen. Twee eeuwen vrouwen en hun psychiaters/Femmes névrosées. Deux siècles d'histoire entre femmes et leurs psychiatres/Nervous Women: Two Centuries of Women and Their Psychiatrists*, Tielt, 2012, p. 175; *Gevaarlijk jong. Kind in gevaar, kind als gevaar/Dangerously Young: Child in Danger, Child as Danger*, Tielt, 2012, p. 192; *Donkere kamers. Over melancholie en depressie/Dark Chambers: On Melancholy and Depression*, Veurne, 2014, p. 144.

¹⁰² Benoît Majerus, "Dire la folie. Expériences des patients psychiatriques (1930-1980)", in Laurence Guignard, Hervé Guillemain and Stéphane Tison, eds., *Expériences de la folie. Criminels, soldats, patients en psychiatrie (XIXe-XXe siècles)*, Rennes, 2013, p. 293-302. See also Benoît Majerus, *Parmi les fous. Une histoire sociale de la psychiatrie au XXe siècle*, Rennes, 2013, p. 305.

¹⁰³ See for example Veerle Massin, "Interned Women and Society: Understanding Psychiatric Commitments (Involuntary Admissions) in Belgium (1910-1970)", <http://www.bejust.be/team/veerle-massin>; and Ilse Luyten, "Voices from Inside the Juvenile Justice System and Beyond: Pathways and Life Experiences of Juveniles After Youth Justice Intervention", <http://www.bejust.be/team/ilse-luyten>.

¹⁰⁴ Helen Grevers, "Collaborators, Justice and Society: A Social History of the Punishment of Collaboration in Belgium after WWII", <http://www.bejust.be/team/helen-grevers>; Gerlinda Swillen, "Conceived by the Second World War: War Children on the Axis Brussels-Berlin. Creation, Birth, Care", http://www.cegesoma.be/cms/rech_encours_en.php?article=734. See also Gerlinda Swillen, *Koekoekskind. Door*

More importantly, their histories are no longer perceived as a mere deviation from the norm and are instead placed within the broader socio-political context of the twentieth century. These endeavours represent a response to repeated academic calls for a break with the “inquisitorial approach” that has for a long time now dominated the history of collaboration in Belgium and the Netherlands.¹⁰⁵

Another notable example of a project which seeks to go beyond the confines of traditional political science is the one currently being carried out by Maarten Van Ginderachter from the Centre for Political History of the Antwerp University. The main objective of this collaborative project is “to innovate nations and nationalism research *from the margins*”. This interdisciplinary research network brings together academicians from all around Europe and focuses on “marginal” case studies (from e.g. Central and Eastern Europe) and groups that are “not part of national(ist) movements, have resisted national integration and/or have been neglected by scholars”. With this purpose in mind, they are reframing “nations and nationalism from outside nationalism studies (e.g. urban history, ethnomethodology)”, bringing together researchers from diverse fields (history, political science, sociology, anthropology, literary studies, etc.) and promoting the use of “original and underused sources”.¹⁰⁶

What is unique about the work of the authors in this special issue is that they include all the new historiographical perspectives described above and go a bit further than what most Belgian scholars have so far dared to do. To begin with, they don’t shy away from using the terms “marginal” and “subaltern” in their analyses, as no negative or essentialist connotation is attached to them. They are not interested in finding any inherent characteristics of marginality or subalternity (as there are none) and instead they stress the groups’ physical and symbolic places in society – at the edge of, but simultaneously in interaction with, the hegemonic centre – as well as the disciplinary and exclusionary nature of the environments they inhabited. These authors convincingly argue that people as different as deserters or draft evaders living in exile (Marnix Beyen), schoolchildren obliged to assimilate (Josephine Hoegaerts), young female delinquents kept in observation centres (Veerle Massin) or the elderly confined in “*espaces policés*” (Sophie Richelle) can all be considered examples of

de vijand verwekt (1940-1945), Antwerpen/Amsterdam, 2009, p. 351; Jos Monballyu, *Deserteurs voor de Vlaamse zaak. Vlaamsgezinde militairen lopen over naar de vijand*, Brugge, 2014, p. 206.

¹⁰⁵ Ido de Haan and Peter Romijn, “Nieuwe geschiedschrijving van de collaboratie. Introductie bij het thema”, *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review*, no. 124, 2009 (3), p. 323-382; Bruno De Wever, Helen Grevers and Rudi Van Doorselaer, “Voorbij Zwart en Wit”, in Bruno De Wever, Helen Grevers, Rudi Van Doorselaer and Jan Julia Zurné, eds., *België en de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, Roularta, 2015, p. 6-9.

¹⁰⁶ “Nations and Nationalism from the Margins”, <https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/conferences/from-the-margins/programme/>.

subaltern populations. Their understanding of the notions of “marginality” and “subalternity” surpasses the “typical triptych race-gender-class” that dominates the history of marginality and subaltern studies in general. They abandon the idea that all “true” subalterns were indigent, illiterate or “entirely unacquainted with the institutions, discourses and memories of the hegemonic culture”, while emphasising the “various shades of subalternity” and including age and politics as categories of identity and arenas of differentiation. Moreover, by accepting the challenge to respond to the question of whether or to what extent the notions of “marginality” and “subalternity” are useful in the study of Belgian history, the contributors to this volume are opening up new avenues for academic debate and future research.

Marginality, subalternity and hegemonic discourses and policies are not viewed here as being diametrically opposed or as monolithic structures but rather as social constructions reaffirming each other and occupying an ambivalent position between compliance and resistance, condemnation and fascination, protection and repression, and science and morality. The societal groups studied in these essays are in fact examples of what Marie-Sylvie Dupont-Duchât has called “*marginalité intégrée*”.¹⁰⁷ Implicitly or explicitly, all of the authors pay close attention to the “evolving dimension” of the margins and to the interaction between the centre and periphery in “gentrification” processes initiated by public or private authorities. More importantly, they demonstrate that, although dispersed, subalterns’ voices can be found. And once found, they contribute a great deal to helping us achieve a better understanding of (Belgian) social, political and cultural realities in all their complexity and diversity.

¹⁰⁷ Dupont-Bouchat, “La prostitution urbain. La marginalité intégrée”.