

## N2 - Research network 'Inclusion, Exclusion and Mobility'

### *Inclusion, exclusion and belonging of the socially vulnerable in the Southern Low Countries, 18th-20th centuries*

Processes of inclusion, exclusion and belonging are essential in order to understand how communities functioned and are closely connected to the balance of power within these communities, both today and in the past. How individuals and groups navigate these processes can strongly depend on the intersectionality between factors such as gender, class, age, economic background and migration profile. This network session looks explicitly at the ways in which those considered to be socially vulnerable and less powerful negotiated processes of inclusion, exclusion and belonging, focusing on the Southern Low Countries from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries. The session consists of two research papers and the presentation of one new collaborative research project.

#### Anne Winter (VUB)

##### *Begging as disaster management? Lettres de quête in the Austrian Netherlands, 1750s-1780s*

This paper analyses c. 400 applications for 'begging letters' conserved in the archives of the Privy Council of the Austrian Netherlands between the 1750s and 1780s. Such Lettres de Quête were issued in name of the Habsburg monarch to subjects who has lost their possessions to fire or other natural disaster, and allowed their bearers to travel around begging. By means of a qualitative reading of the materials, the article uncovers underlying administrative procedures while throwing light on the social selectivity, practices and gains associated with this little-known phenomenon. By demonstrating that such 'begging letters' were customary policy practice, as they probably were in neighbouring countries, it signals their importance as an early modern mode of disaster management and highlights their ambiguous role as a policy paradox in a context of increasing criminalization of begging and vagrancy.

#### Hilde Greefs (UA) & Anne Winter (VUB)

##### *Migration trajectories and settlement patterns of Eastern-European newcomers in Antwerp at the turn of the twentieth century: the Jewish dimension?*

As a port city and important hub for transatlantic migration, Antwerp welcomed increasing numbers of migrants and mobile groups during the nineteenth century. As the century progressed, more foreign migrants tended to move over longer distances and from a wider array of places. Next to migrants from neighbouring countries, increasing numbers of migrants from Eastern-Europe and Russia found their way to Antwerp. Although the majority of these Eastern-European migrants were on their way to America, and only temporarily stayed in Antwerp, increasing numbers also settled in the city. By exploring some sample years in the foreigners'

files, we will focus on the migration trajectories, profiles and settlement patterns of these foreign newcomers, a significant proportion of whom likely had a Jewish background. Although the foreigners' files contain interesting information on the migration trajectories (birth place, last place of residence), social background (family composition, occupation) and settlement patterns in the city, religion is not mentioned so we can only trace it indirectly. However, the source offers us important insights in the backgrounds and occupational profiles of this new wave of Jewish newcomers who were probably also attracted by the re-awakening of the diamond industry in Antwerp in the closing decades of the nineteenth century.

### Ann Vandenberghe (State Archives of Belgium)

*OUTLAW: Uncovering criminal justice trajectories in nineteenth and twentieth-century Belgium through citizen science*

OUTLAW is a four-year (2022-2026) research and valorization project of the Belgian State Archives and Ghent University on criminal justice trajectories. It focuses on outsiders such as Bertha, an unmarried corset maker with two children, who on 7 February 1924 was sent to Ghent prison for helping a young girl have an abortion. OUTLAW wants to reconstruct the untold stories and experiences of Bertha and the approximately 150,000 other convicted men and women who spent time in a Belgian prison between 1855 and 1924. With the help of dozens of volunteers, we are currently creating a database that will provide an unprecedented overview of the convicted prison population in Belgium during the second half of the nineteenth and the first quarter of the twentieth century. This presentation zooms in on the research potential of this database. It will be a powerful research tool for social historians and historical criminologists to uncover mechanisms of inclusion, exclusion and mobility within the Belgian legal and penal system, allowing a better understanding of both social vulnerability and agency in the past.