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Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cpdh20>

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Published online: 20 Nov 2012.

To cite this article: Sarah Van Ruyskensvelde (2013): Remembering wartime schooling... Catholic education, teacher memory and World War II in Belgium, *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education*, 49:1, 149-159

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2012.744064>

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Remembering wartime schooling... Catholic education, teacher memory and World War II in Belgium

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(Received 30 August 2012; final version received 23 October 2012)

Power over education and the upcoming generations has always been an important instrument in shaping religious and secular values. As a consequence, control over schools, pupils and teachers was, particularly in periods of war, an important means for bringing about acceptance of the new regime. The aim of this paper is to discuss priest-teachers' wartime memories of German interference in Belgian education during Second World War, on the basis of a survey conducted in the 1970s. By looking at teachers' memories, this paper contributes to a neglected field of study in the history of education and the historiography of Second World War. The analysis of the questionnaires illuminate how certain aspects of German educational policy were remembered by teachers and how they positioned themselves in the landscape of Second World War memory. As a result, this paper demonstrates that the survey not only offers an interesting source for investigating the war itself, but also sheds light on the changing post-war relationship between education, society and the state.

Keywords: World War II; teacher memory; Belgium; catholic education

Introduction

As historian Patrick Hutton has noted, "Few topics in recent years have elicited as much interest among historians as the relationship between memory and history."¹ A quick search of library catalogues or an overview of recent scholarly articles on memory and history reveals that, ever since the "flowering of the oral history movement",² numerous historians of World War II have studied the place of war in public and individual memory.³ However, research on children's and adolescents' wartime memories has been far less common,⁴ and historians have yet to systematically map

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¹Patrick Hutton, "Recent Scholarship on Memory and History," *The History Teacher* 33 (2000): 533.

²Philip Gardner, *Hermeneutics, History and Memory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 90.

³See for instance Francesca Capelletto, ed., *Memory and World War II: An Ethnographic Approach* (Oxford/New York: Berg, 2005); Susan Ruban Suleiman, *Crises of Memory and the Second World War* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2006); Michael Greyer and Michael Latham, "The Place of the Second World War in German Memory and History," *New German Critique* 71 (1997): 5–40.

⁴See for instance Nicholas Stargardt's latest book on children's memory: Nicholas Stargardt, *Witnesses of War: Children's Lives Under the Nazis* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2006).

pupils' and teachers' wartime memories.⁵ This is an especially regrettable shortcoming in the history of education and in the historiography of World War II, since research into teachers' and pupils' memories would help illuminate and explain the many intersections between education, society and the state. Indeed, not only does World War II play an important normative function in Western democracies⁶ but also, in the case of Belgium, historical research has shown that the wartime memories of several societal groups crystallised around specific conceptions of the state.⁷

This article endeavours to partly fill the previously mentioned gap by focusing on ways in which Belgian Catholic priest-teachers have remembered the German occupying power's ideological interference in schools and its control over educational practices during World War II. The reason for this focus is twofold. First, as Roy Lowe argued in 1992 in his introduction to the first international study on the impact of World War II on schooling systems, "the Second World War was seen at the time as a war of competing ideologies which seemed, at least to those living through it, to be more starkly contrasting than the issues which had divided combatants in earlier conflicts".⁸ Second, Belgium offers an interesting case study in this respect, given that, since its independence in 1830, the country has witnessed the competition of several nationalistic ideologies, including Flemish nationalism and Belgian Unitarianism. Such tensions formed a divisive element in the Belgian remembrance culture of World War II.

This paper tackles the issue of teachers' wartime memories mainly through the analysis of questionnaires. More specifically, I have selected questionnaires completed by priest-teachers that shed light on their memories in relation to German interference in education, collaboration and resistance, the Jewish Question and retaliation for wartime collaboration. Via these sources, this paper illuminates how certain aspects of German educational policy were remembered by teachers and how they positioned themselves in the landscape of World War II memory.

Church, clergy and World War II memory

Since the 1950s, Belgian historiography has devoted considerable attention to patterns of World War II memory. Yet it was not until the 1970s that the mythologising historiography of the initial post-war decades yielded to more scientific literature on the subject. Generally, scholars have characterised the Belgian landscape of World War II memory as scattered, fragmented and discordant. It has been frequently noted that the Belgian state occupied a rather weak position in the country's

⁵Internationally, interesting research has been done by Peter Cunningham and Philip Gardner. For a more general introduction, see Philip Gardner, "Oral History in Education: Teacher's Memory and Teacher's History," *History of Education* 32 (2003): 175–88; Peter Cunningham and Philip Gardner, *Becoming Teachers: Texts and Testimonies 1907–1950* (London: Woburn, 2004).

⁶Hans Blom, "Van bron naar beeld?," *Spiegel Historiae* 29 (1994): 106.

⁷For a recent overview of World War II memory in Belgium, see Bruno Benvindo and Evert Peeters, eds. *Scherven van de Oorlog. De strijd om de herinnering aan WOII* (Antwerpen: De Bezige Bij, 2011).

⁸Roy Lowe, "Introduction," in *Education and the Second World War: Studies in Schooling and Social Change*, ed. Roy Lowe (London, The Falmer Press, 1992), 2.

commemoration culture.⁹ As a result, research on the topic has stressed the differences between Flemish and Walloon memories of World War II and has focused on how various societal groups coped with and addressed the heritage of collaboration and resistance. One of the most persistent myths in Flemish World War II commemoration culture revolved around retaliation for wartime collaboration. More specifically, public opinion among Flemish Catholics in particular considered the Belgian state's punishment of collaborators just after the war to be unnecessarily harsh and essentially "anti-Flemish". It was widely believed that the post-war trials were not so much (if at all) geared towards punishing collaboration with the enemy, but were in fact intended to break Flemish nationalism and its proponents.¹⁰ In contrast, in the French-speaking part of Belgium (i.e. Brussels and Wallonia), it was Belgian nationalism, anti-fascism and the social liberation battle that prevailed in post-war commemoration culture.¹¹

Questions about how teachers and pupils remembered their time in school and how their memories relate to these dominant patterns of World War II memory in Belgian society remain unanswered. Fortunately, there are some sources that make research into those questions possible. For example, in 1977, three researchers at what is now the Centre for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Contemporary Society (CEGESOMA) in Brussels organised a national questionnaire aiming at collecting and archiving World War II memories of (retired) Belgian priests. During the war, most teachers in Catholic secondary schools were priests, and so the answers to the questionnaire provide information about the impact of the war on school culture and how teachers in Catholic secondary education remembered the German occupation.

On the basis of the identity index on the first page of the questionnaire, I selected those priests who were active in secondary education between 1940 and 1944 (but not necessarily during the entire period of the war) as teachers, financial administrators, principals or housemasters. This selection yielded a total sample of 436 questionnaires (269 for Flanders, 167 for Wallonia), which form the basis of this study.

The questionnaire asks each respondent to discuss his memories of, respectively, May 1940 (i.e. the German attack on 10 May and the capitulation by Leopold III on 28 May), the relation between the Church and the German occupation, collaboration, resistance, forced labour, the Jewish Question, bombardments, food shortages, development of religious practices, the Royal Question¹² and legal and extralegal retributions for wartime collaboration. Because this project was systematically conducted and preserved, it remains useful for both a qualitative and a quanti-

⁹Bruno Benvindo & Evert Peeters, eds. *Scherven van de Oorlog. De strijd om de herinnering aan WOII* (Antwerpen: De Bezige Bij, 2011), 13.

¹⁰Marnix Beyen, "'Zwart wordt van langs om meer de Vlaamsgezinde massa'. De Vlaamse beeldvorming over bezetting en repressie, 1945-2000", in *Het gewicht van het oorlogsverleden*, ed. José Gotovitch and Chantal Kesteloot (Gent: Academia Press, 2003), 107-9; Rudi Van Doorslaer, "Steeds wordt een andere oorlog beschreven. Recente tendensen in de oorlogshistoriografie in België," *Spiegel Historiael* 29 (1997): 150.

¹¹Rudi Van Doorslaer, "Steeds wordt een andere oorlog beschreven. Recente tendensen in de oorlogshistoriografie in België," *Spiegel Historiael* 29 (1997): 148.

¹²The Royal Question refers to a political conflict that arose after the Second World War about the return of King Leopold III. For an English introduction to this subject, see Ramon E. Arrango, *Leopold III and the Belgian Royal Question* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1961).

tative approach to the subject. Moreover, given the lack of oral history source material, the questionnaire is one of few sources that provide an idea of the activities of priest-teachers in Belgium during World War II, including their involvement in the resistance, in efforts to hide Jews and in underground networks for persons who refused to perform forced labour in the German war industry. As the identity index of the questionnaire evidences, most priest-teachers who were active in education between 1940 and 1944 were born between 1890 and 1920. Thus, the “youngest” of them would now be over 90 years old. Although I have been able to locate some of these former teachers, the resultant disparate oral histories cannot be considered a representative sample for this type of project.

Since the main focus of this article is on retrospective source material, it concerns only memories rather than experiences of war. As Janet Watson has convincingly argued, the difference between memory and experience as categories is an important one. In her work *Fighting Different Wars*, Watson distinguishes between World War I as lived experience, which she investigates on the basis of personal and public accounts stemming from the war years, and the war as memory, which she studies on the basis of post-war personal and public accounts.¹³ In the context of this article, a discussion of the wide range of available accounts pertaining to teachers’ and principals’ wartime experiences, such as school diaries and correspondences, would lead too far. Hence, these sources are not addressed here.

The questionnaire results offer the possibility of mapping patterns of World War II memories in Catholic educational milieus in the 1970s. The timing of the questionnaire is particularly notable, since it was precisely at this time that the putative causes and meanings of World War II were undergoing their first major reformulations.¹⁴ Likewise, around this time Europe was seeing the “modernisation” of its World War II commemoration culture. Although in Belgium this process was not concluded until the 1990s, the dominant “closed” patriotic discourse began shifting towards an “open” human rights discourse, in which the negative aspects of the country’s wartime history were no longer denied but instead directly confronted.¹⁵ Nonetheless, as the following sections of this article show, Catholic priest-teachers took only hesitant steps in the direction of confronting of their wartime past.

Education under siege? Catholic memories of German interference in secondary schools

Interestingly, the three previously mentioned CEGESOMA researchers paid special attention to education in their survey. On the third page of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked whether they had “personally experienced German interference in primary or secondary education”. A total of 39.2% of the respondents indicated that they remembered direct German interference in secondary education. Only 9.6% of the priest-teachers did not answer the question or claimed to have no recollection of such matters, and 51.1% claimed never to have personally experienced German interference in education. The analysis shows that there are no sig-

¹³Janet Watson, *Fighting Different Wars. Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹⁴Rudi Van Doorslaer, “Steeds wordt een andere oorlog beschreven. Recente tendensen in de oorlogshistoriografie in België,” *Spiegel Historiael* 29 (1997): 147.

¹⁵Bruno Benvindo and Evert Peeters, eds. *Scherven van de Oorlog. De strijd om de herinnering aan WOII* (Antwerpen: De Bezige Bij, 2011), 14–16.

nificant differences between Flemish and Walloon priest-teachers in respect to this question.

Generally, three main channels of German interference are present in the volunteered memories of (retired) priest-teachers: (1) the full or partial occupation of the school by German troops; (2) changes in curriculum and teaching package, as well as German inspection of classroom practices; and (3) the request for lists of all final-year pupils (for the purposes of forced labour). Interestingly, there is a significant overlap between the respondents' memories and the main measures taken by the German occupiers between 1940 and 1944. Although German educational policy took a much broader approach than just these three restrictive measures,¹⁶ changes in curricula, summoning of pupils and occupation of classrooms were most prevalent at the lower educational levels.¹⁷

(1) Education and occupation: the requisition and occupation of schools and classrooms

From the beginning of the war, teachers and pupils were confronted with the physical presence of troops in schools. Many Catholic schools faced three consecutive occupations: first by Belgian soldiers, during the early days of the German war threat and eventual attack; then by German troops, during the military occupation between May 1940 and September 1944; and finally by Allied soldiers, after the liberation in September 1944. Schools offered ideal locations for accommodation of troops, as they were often equipped with kitchens, dormitories, classrooms, refectories and – especially in the countryside – small vegetable gardens and/or livestock.

Unsurprisingly, the issue appears to occupy an important place in the post-war memories of priest-teachers. 29.8% of the priest-teachers who vividly remember German interference in education claim to have personally experienced the occupation and billeting of their schools or classrooms. A comparison between Belgium's two linguistic regions suggests that occupation of schools left a slightly more prominent impression in Flemish than in Walloon memory: respectively, 32% and 26% of Flemish and Walloon priest-teachers remember being confronted with billeted German soldiers.

The individual memories illustrate the many ways in which daily school life was hindered by this occupation. Teachers experienced difficulties in teaching and many schools even (temporarily) closed as a result of the presence of German troops. In some cases, classes took place in other schools, congregations or with

¹⁶For more details on the German restrictive policy towards Catholic education and the negotiations between the Roman Catholic Church and the German occupier, see Sarah Van Ruyskensvelde, "Naar een nieuwe onderwijsvrede. De onderhandelingen tussen Kardinaal Van Roey en de Duitse bezetter over de toekomst van het vrij, katholiek onderwijs, 1942-1943," *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* 40 (2010): 603-43.

¹⁷For an English introduction to the German educational policy towards Catholic education, see Sarah Van Ruyskensvelde, "Education and Occupation. An introduction to the History of Catholic Secondary Education in Belgium during World War II," *History of Education and Children's Literature* 5 (2010): 229-47; For a Dutch introduction to the subject, see Sarah Van Ruyskensvelde, "De school in oorlogstijd. Het katholiek middelbaar onderwijs tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog in België," in *Pedagogische historiografie. Een socio-culturele lezing van de geschiedenis van opvoeding en onderwijs*, ed. Angelo Van Gorp, Pieter Dhondt, Frank Simon and Marc Depaepe (Leuven: Acco, 2011), 123-47.

private families in the city. For instance, Charles Reumont, a teacher in the Collège Saint-Augustin in Enghien (Wallonia), noted:

The grammar school in Enghien was requisitioned by the Germans and the army in May 1940: a military occupation, a hospital and a prisoners' camp for Allied soldiers, thereafter barracks, and eventually in August 1944 a field hospital. The grammar school had to take refuge in a study home of the French Jesuits.¹⁸

Temporary school closures were, in some cases, not solely the result of the occupation. The questionnaires reveal that the physical presence of German troops in schools often resulted in clashes between soldiers and pupils. Jean Mairy, a teacher in the Collège Saint-Thérèse in Herve (Wallonia), testified:

In December 1940, the grammar school was partly occupied by Germans (an artillery unit) and, in spite of our efforts and recommendations, the pupils harassed the Germans. On December 6, the grammar school was closed down and the pupils were *manu militari* thrown out. Furthermore, the principal and a German language teacher were arrested. Also I was arrested in the afternoon. We all went to the prison of St-Leonard in Liège and I had to appear before German court, but was acquitted on April 1, 1941. (...).¹⁹

Although these examples illustrate the – sometimes far-reaching – consequences of the German occupation, the importance of the individual stories and testimonies should not be overemphasised. Indeed, it should be kept in mind that only about 30% of the respondents appear to remember the billeting of troops and requisitioning of schools, although most schools were indeed occupied at some point.

(2) “The curricular battle”: The purges of textbooks

As concerns changed in school curricula and teaching packages, many of the teachers of history (particularly contemporary history), geography and languages remember German interference in their classes. For example, it was required that passages concerning the French–German war of 1870, World War I and the Treaty of Versailles be removed from history textbooks. French and English language teachers remember their courses being reduced and sometimes even abolished in favor of German language courses and works by Jewish writers being cut from literary textbooks. Geography teachers were not allowed to comment on the current geographical European constellation.

The German occupier adopted several means of control over school curricula and teaching packages. First, since the German military administration regularly received complaints about use of textbooks that allegedly besmirched the honor of the German Army, People or the *Reich*, the occupier established a Commission for the Revision of School Manuals on 8 October 1940. This commission, which operated under the auspices of the Ministry of Public Education,²⁰ was tasked with two

¹⁸CEGESOMA, AA 1217, Enquête Kerk en Clerus tijdens de Bezetting, Map Tournai, Charles Reumont.

¹⁹CEGESOMA, AA 1217, Enquête Kerk en Clerus tijdens de Bezetting, Map Liège, Jean Mairy.

²⁰Paul Aron and José Gotovitch, *Dictionnaire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale* (Bruxelles: André Versailles, 2008), 166.

responsibilities: namely, to prepare for standardisation of Belgian textbooks and to eliminate any textbooks that subverted “German and historical objectivity”.²¹ However, although the commission regularly published an index of “forbidden textbooks”, the use of *Deutschfeindliche* school manuals remained a problem throughout the war, as the commission could not entirely control classroom practices. In the questionnaire, some priest-teachers attested that they, often indirectly, commented on Nazism or the political situation of the moment. Conrad De Meulenaere, a teacher at the Onze-Lieve-Vrouwcollege in Oostende (Flanders), explained:

We could feel that we were closely watched. (...) During class, I could allude to the German occupation, for instance by referring to Roman or Greek history. These allusions were well understood by many of my pupils and, although some of them were proponents of the New Order, I was never tattled on.²²

As De Meulenaere’s testimony makes clear, teachers were not free to comment on the earlier, current or future political or geographical situations. Generally, there were two ways in which classroom practice was controlled. First, the Gestapo or German inspectors regularly burst unannounced into classes in order to check textbooks and pupils’ notes. As Frans Doms, a teacher in the Sint-Jozefcollege in Herentals, noted:

We needed to mind our words during class, particularly in the three highest classes when I had to discuss the Latin writers that paralleled with the present political situation. There were always pupil members of New [Order] youth movements. During history class, the situation was even worse. Two times, a German officer came into class to examine our history textbooks and ordered the teacher to alter certain passages to present Germany in a positive way, particularly in relation to contemporary history (war ’14-’18, Treaty of Versailles).²³

Second, most of the priest-teachers had an urgent sense that they had to be careful not to antagonise “black pupils or parents”, for they ran the real risk of being informed on. As the memories of former teachers reveal, particular care was necessary concerning students involved in collaborating youth movements. As Robrecht Stock, a teacher and inspector of the Sint-Lodewijkcollege in Bruges, noted, unfavourable comments about the German occupier or the occupation could have severe consequences:

In my classes, I was devoted to combating the basic principles of Nazism. Some pupils (and although small in number, but enough to inform the German occupier) notified the Military Administration. In June, 1941, some colleagues of mine were summoned by the German Secret Service and were then asked for information about me.²⁴

²¹Kristel De Smedt, “De herziening van de schoolboeken tijdens de bezetting (1940-1944),” *Bijdragen tot de Eigentijdse Geschiedenis – Cahiers d’Histoire du Temps Présent* 14 (1991): 179.

²²CEGESOMA, AA 1217, Enquête Kerk en Clerus tijdens de Bezetting, Map Bisdom Brugge, Getuigenis van Conrad De Meulenaere.

²³CEGESOMA, AA 1217, Enquête Kerk en Clerus tijdens de Bezetting, Map Bisdom Mechelen, Frans Doms.

²⁴CEGESOMA, AA 1217, Enquête Kerk en Clerus tijdens de Bezetting, Map Bisdom Brugge, Robrecht Stock.

Interestingly, the fear of “pupil spies” in the classroom led six Flemish teachers to claim, either implicitly or explicitly, that they had experienced more trouble with collaborators than with the German occupier.²⁵ This openness towards identifying Flemish collaboration may be indicative of the changing attitude towards collaboration in World War II memory.

(3) *Pupils for the German war industry: Catholic resistance against forced labor*

On 7 October 1942, the German occupation authorities issued a decree subjecting all eligible Belgians to forced labour in Germany. This action was intended to help fortify the German economy and was not unique to Belgium.²⁶ The ordinance permitted the occupier to conscript into forced labour any men between the ages of 18 and 50, and any women between the age of 21 and 35.²⁷ Forced labour in Germany was not without peril, as work and living conditions were generally poor. Forced labourers lived in small barracks that usually lacked provisioning.²⁸

Secondary school pupils were in theory not affected by this measure, as they were usually under 18. However, if they wished to enrol for university education, they were obliged to work for a time in German or Belgian factories. Towards this end, the German occupier demanded that secondary-school principals handed over lists of all final-year pupils. Of the 171 respondents who had clear memories of German interference in education, 27 (or 15.7%) claimed to have personally experienced consequences of the forced-labour measures. Analysis of the questionnaire also points to a slight difference between the French- and Dutch-speaking parts of the country: 14.1% of Flemish teachers remembered having experienced effects of the forced-labour measures, compared to 18.4% of teachers from the French-speaking part of the country.

Resistance to this measure was widespread and most principals and teachers in Catholic secondary schools disregarded it – an action for which they were sometimes jailed.²⁹ Local school authorities tried to circumvent the measures, for instance by extending secondary education into a “*superrhetorika*” or *seventh year*. As Leo Casteels, a teacher and later principal of the Sint-Jan Berchmanscollege in Mol, noted:

After the introduction of forced labor for graduates in secondary school, we organized a “super senior year” in order to extend pupils’ student days – those pupils were admitted on the lists of the ordinary pupils – (...). Through a Belgian (who worked

²⁵This particular stance seems to have been specific to the Flemish context, since I have not found this in any of the French questionnaires.

²⁶For further information about Germany’s forced labor actions, see for instance Herbert Ulrich, *Hitler’s Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labour in Germany Under the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Mark Spoerer, *Zwangsarbeit unter dem Hakenkreuz. Ausländische Zivilarbeiter, Kriegsgefangene und Häftlinge im Deutschen Reich und im besetzten Europa, 1939-1945* (Stuttgart/München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2001).

²⁷Aron and Gotovitch, *Dictionnaire de la Seconde Guerre mondiale en Belgique* (Bruxelles: André Versailles, 2008), 439–41.

²⁸Aron and Gotovitch, *Dictionnaire de la Seconde Guerre mondiale en Belgique* (Bruxelles: André Versailles, 2008), 442.

²⁹Edmond Leclef, *Kardinaal Van Roey en de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (Bruxelles: Goemaere, 1946), 160.

for the Gestapo, but secretly was a member of the resistance) we tried to get certificates into the German indexing system in exchange for a *Schein* (exemption for students).³⁰

Some teachers and principals became involved in arranging safe houses and fake identity cards in order to protect their final-year pupils against deportation to Germany. The questionnaire results also suggest that many school authorities starkly refused to obey German forced-labour orders. In many cases, they created excuses or refused to hand over the lists of their final-year pupils. The testimony of Maurits De Brie, principal of the Sint-Aloysiuscollege in Menen, illustrates this type of resistance:

Particularly in the final year before the resistance, I was asked to hand over the list of all last-year pupils. For instance, July 20, 1944: letter of the *Feldkommandantur* Kortrijk, in name of *Mil. Befehlshaber Belgien und Nordfrankreich*: names, birth dates and addresses of all last-year pupils are demanded. My answer, as usual: not authorized to give that type of information. August 7: visit of two gentlemen of the *Werbestelle des Reichsarbeitersministerium* Kortrijk, not at home. Two days later, second visit: a military official and a civilian (who did not say a word, probably a Fleming) ask for the list, I refuse – they start searching my office, for an hour. I had taken the necessary precautions and all documents were gone. Why did I react like that? 1/ Because the higher [Episcopal] authority asked to do so, 2/ I saw it as my duty to protect my students, not to turn them over to the enemy.³¹

These testimonies should be contextualised into the widespread protests against the forced-labour measures in Belgian society. Not only did these measures force youths to define their position towards the occupier; they were also an important factor in the relation between the Church and the military government. As was the case in France, Germany and Italy, Church authorities in Belgium had reached a *modus vivendi* with the *Militärverwaltung* and maintained a pragmatic position. However, because they feared the issue of forced labour might divide Catholics, they were forced to abandon their passive stance. In Belgium, as in other countries, the Catholic resistance against forced labour was mainly motivated by moral grounds,³² in that such labour could lead to moral corruption, particularly for girls and young women.³³ Furthermore, Catholics feared that young people would disconnect from their Catholic communities.³⁴

Discussion

The aim of this article has been to discuss priest-teachers' wartime memories of German interference in Belgian education during World War II on the basis of a

³⁰CEGESOMA, AA 1217, Enquête Kerk en Clerus tijdens de Bezetting, Map Bisdom Mechelen, Leo Casteels.

³¹CEGESOMA, AA 1217, Enquête Kerk en Clerus tijdens de Bezetting, Bisdom Brugge, Maurits De Brie.

³²Wilfred Douglas Halls, *The Youth of Vichy France* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 357.

³³Halls, *The Youth of Vichy France*, 369; Edmond Leclef, *Kardinaal Van Roey en de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (Bruxelles: Goemaere, 1946), 152.

³⁴Michael E. O'Sullivan, "An Eroding Milieu? Catholic Youth, Church Authority, and Popular Behavior in Northwest Germany during the Third Reich, 1933-1938," *The Catholic Historical Review*, 90 (2004): 245.

survey conducted in the 1970s among such teachers. Despite the large body of historical research on World War II memory, research into teacher memory largely remains virgin territory.

The conclusions reached by analysis of the questionnaire are twofold. The questionnaire illustrates ways in which the German occupier aimed at controlling Belgian schooling and classroom practices and how such attempts were remembered after the war. Remarkably, less than half of the respondents recalled German interference in education, which is illustrative of the general failure of the German restrictive educational policy. As earlier research has shown, four years proved too short a timeframe in which to deeply impact the Belgian educational system. As a result, there was a high degree of continuity in Belgian education during World War II.³⁵ The German measures which did find their way into teachers' wartime memories – such as changes in curriculum, the requisitioning and occupation of schools and classrooms and forced labour – directly and severely impacted school life. Aspects of the German educational policy that did not directly affect daily schooling are not mentioned.

Analysis of the questionnaire also demonstrates how and where priest-teachers situated themselves in the landscape of World War II memory. What predominates in their answers is a focus on the restrictive German educational policy (or at least some aspects of it), how schools were victims of such measures and how these priest-teachers sought to circumvent them and maintain classroom practice. In particular, the German demands for lists of final-year pupils and for curricula changes met local resistance. Still, although the German occupier did indeed consider Catholic schools “bastions of resistance”,³⁶ the respondents' focus on resistance also ties in with specific ways of dealing with the wartime past. On the Francophone side of the linguistic border there predominated the idea that the resistance had essentially been Francophone, which also explains the dominant position of resistance in Walloon memory.³⁷ In contrast, as Marnix Beyen has argued, Flemish public opinion could deal with its wartime past through changing definitions and conceptions about resistance and collaboration. More specifically, after the war, it was regularly emphasised that not only armed resisters and saboteurs deserved recognition and appreciation for opposing the occupation, but also those who undertook non-formal or so-called “constructive” acts of resistance, such as the refusal of handing over lists of final-year pupils or informal comments on Germany in the classroom, which were considered to have been equally important.³⁸

Still, although the patterns in teachers' war memories largely coincide with traditional, patriotic wartime memory discourse, collaboration is not completely

³⁵Sarah Van Ruyskensvelde, “De school in oorlogstijd. Het katholiek middelbaar onderwijs tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog in België,” in *Pedagogische historiografie*, ed. Angelo Van Gorp, Pieter Dhondt, Frank Simon and Marc Depaepe (Leuven: Acco, 2011), 145.

³⁶Jean-Leon Charles and Philippe Dasnoy, *Les dossiers secrets de la police allemande en Belgique* (Bruxelles: Arts et Voyages, 1972), cited in Machteld Bergen, “De katholieken in Leuven tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog” (master's thesis, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2003), 66.

³⁷Chantal Kesteloot, “La Résistance: ciment d'une identité en Wallonie?,” in *La Résistance et les Européens du Nord* (Bruxelles/Paris, CREHSGM/Institut d'Histoire du Temps présent, 1994), 406.

³⁸Marnix Beyen, “‘Zwart wordt van langs om meer de Vlaamsgezinde massa’. De Vlaamse beeldvorming over bezetting en repressie, 1945-2000,” in *het oorlogsverleden*, ed. José Gotovitch & Chantal Kesteloot (Gent: Academia Press, 2003), 113–4.

denied, which reflects the changing attitude in the 1970s towards the wartime past. This underscores how the memories of priest-teachers were conditioned and mediated by the circumstances of the period, changing conceptions about the state and the changing nature of addressing the wartime past at the end of the 1970. In this sense, the survey is a useful source not only for studying the war itself, but also for investigating the changing relationship between education, society and the state after the war.

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