

# Breaking the Silence

*The Experiences of Deaf People  
in East Flanders, 1750-1950.  
A Life Course Approach*

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Proefschrift voorgelegd tot het behalen van de graad van Doctor in de Geschiedenis  
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Het doorbreken van de stilte.

De ervaringen van doven in Oost-Vlaanderen, 1750-1950. Een levensloonderzoek

Cover image: "Self-Portrait as a Deaf Man" – Sir Joshua Reynolds, c.1775

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Faculteit Letteren & Wijsbegeerte

Sofie De Veirman

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2014



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*“Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing.”<sup>1</sup>*

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---

<sup>1</sup> Helen Keller (1880-1968), American author, political activist, lecturer and deaf-blind. In: *The Open Door* (1957). New York: Doubleday.

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# Introduction

## The history of people with disabilities

*“Disability is everywhere in history, once you begin looking for it, but conspicuously absent in the histories we write.”<sup>1</sup>*

Impairment is ubiquitous in human society, and as archaeological evidence suggests, was also present in past societies. According to the World Health Organization, approximately 10 percent of the world’s population was either physically or mentally impaired at any moment in time. Thus impairment is and has been a factor in a large number of people’s lives, both in past as well as present-day societies.<sup>2</sup> In spite of the fact that people with impairments are an integral part of society, their position within society is far from integrated.

A concept that is often used in today’s society in relation to disadvantaged groups is *inclusion*: the inclusion of disadvantaged groups in society based on equal rights and duties. In reality, however, the promises of inclusion often remain empty words. People with disabilities are employed in ‘sheltered’ workshops, are incapacitated or go to special schools. As a result, the social dichotomy which segregates disabled people from an *able* society lives on. This inequality remained largely uncontested until the turbulent 1960s and early 1970s when disabled people, organized in interest groups, started criticizing this social dichotomy and formulated their own (political) rights for gaining a fully-fledged place in society. Eventually their ideas entered the social sciences, to the

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<sup>1</sup> Baynton, D. (2001) “Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History” In: Umansky, L. & Longmore, P.K. (eds.) *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*. New York: New York University Press, 52. Original citations are in italic, while translated citations are in roman. This pattern is applied throughout the dissertation.

<sup>2</sup> Metzler, I. (2006) *Disability in Medieval Europe. Thinking About Physical Impairment During the High Middle Ages, c. 1100-1400*. London: Routledge, 3-4.

extent that today there is an autonomous discipline called *disability studies*.<sup>3</sup> Disability studies is a growing multi-disciplinary field. Although a relative newcomer to the academic arena, it has firmly established itself as an important area of scholarly interest.<sup>4</sup> The central concept is *disability*: the social consequences of an *impairment*, the incomplete use of a body part or body function.<sup>5</sup> Or as Lennard J. Davis, English professor and disability scholar, puts it: “Disability is not so much the lack of a sense or the presence of a physical or mental impairment as it is the reception and construction of that difference [...] An impairment is a physical fact, but a disability is a social construction”.<sup>6</sup> To adapt the words of the French feminist Simone de Beauvoir, one is born impaired, but made disabled.<sup>7</sup>

While scholars in the fields of social policy, sociology, law, literature and the medical humanities quickly understood the relevance of disability to their own disciplines, historians have long remained in the background. In 1970, the blind philosopher and educator Fared Haj stated that the history of physical disability – in contrast to the history of mental impairments, which has been able to garner much more attention from the historiography of psychiatry – was virtually unexplored territory.<sup>8</sup> Twenty years later, sociologist Michael Oliver reaffirmed Haj’s assertion.<sup>9</sup> Geographer Brendan Gleeson even went so far as to say that history in disability studies was simply absent.<sup>10</sup> Since there has been historical interest in welfare, poverty, labour, class and social medicine, it is puzzling as to why disability history has been neglected for so long. For, as disability historian Meagan Kowalsky states: “If one considers the matter further, one can find a place for disability in nearly all avenues of historical inquiry”.<sup>11</sup> Historian Irena Metzler attributes this lack of historical interest in disability to its universality and image of passivity. According to Metzler (paraphrasing Charles T. Wood), historians have conceived of their

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<sup>3</sup> Umansky, L. & Longmore, P.K. (2001) “Introduction: Disability History. From the Margins to the Mainstream” In: Umansky, L. & Longmore, P.K. (eds.), 12; Albrecht, G.L. et al. (2001) “L’émergence des disability studies: état des lieux et perspectives” *Sciences Sociales et Santé*, 19/4, 47.

<sup>4</sup> Kowalsky, M. (2004) “Book Review: Disability and Social Policy in Britain since 1750: a History of Exclusion” *Reviews in history* <<http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/453>>, consulted on 03/12/2013.

<sup>5</sup> Braddock, D.L. & Parish, S.L. (2001) “An Institutional History of Disability” In: Seelman, K.D., Albrecht, G.L. & Bury, M. (eds.) *Handbook of Disability Studies*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 11-2.

<sup>6</sup> Davis, L. (2000) “Dr. Johnson, Amelia, and the Discourse of Disability in the Eighteenth Century” In: Deutsch, H. & Nussbaum, F. (eds.) *‘Defects’: Engendering the Modern Body*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 56.

<sup>7</sup> Metzler, I. (2006) *Disability in Medieval Europe. Thinking About Physical Impairment During the High Middle Ages, c. 1100-1400*. London: Routledge, 21.

<sup>8</sup> Haj, F. (1970) *Disability in Antiquity*. New York: Philosophical Library, 13.

<sup>9</sup> Oliver, M. (1990) *The Politics of Disablement: A Sociological Approach*. New York: St. Martin's press, xi.

<sup>10</sup> Gleeson, B. (1997) “Disability Studies: A Historical Materialist View” *Disability and society*, 12/2, 185.

<sup>11</sup> Kowalsky, M. (2004) “Book Review: Disability and Social Policy in Britain since 1750: a History of Exclusion”.

discipline as being primarily concerned with processes of change.<sup>12</sup> As disability can be considered to have always been with us, “*like the poor, taxes and death*”, it seemed therefore in no need of a historical explanation. Moreover, as historiographers collect knowledge about actions of individuals or groups that are able to act, and disabled people are perceived as inactive, disabled people were not considered suitable subjects.<sup>13</sup>

Although historical interest in disability has had a slow start, we have come a long way since Baynton’s statement that “*disability is everywhere in history, once you begin looking for it, but conspicuously absent from the histories we write*”.<sup>14</sup> In the last two decades, research on disability and history has accelerated rapidly, with the number of historical publications and networks undeniably increasing across Europe and the United States.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, most of the works relying on a historical perspective have been written by sociologists and disability activists, which explains their often abstract nature and the focus on the study of social structures. Moreover, they have been more or less restricted to the Anglo-Saxon world. Until recently, disability history has been represented as predominantly the history of institutional, educational and medical practices. The disabled are thereby presented as *one single, clearly defined group* in contrast to an *able* majority.<sup>16</sup> Despite the value of these critical institutional approaches, there has been criticism about the lack of research into the personal experiences of disablement. “*The central aspect of disability history*”, professor in special education Karen Hirsch proclaimed, “*is the experience - individual and social - of living with a disability*”.<sup>17</sup> What of the disabled people themselves? What was the attitude towards people with a disability? In what way did an impairment influence the life of a person in the past and how did disabled people handle their own disability and the attitude of others towards them?

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<sup>12</sup> Wood, C.T. (1981) “The Doctor’s Dilemma: Sin, Salvation, and the Menstrual Cycle in Medieval Thought” *Medieval Academy of America*, 56/4, 710.

<sup>13</sup> Metzler, I. (2006) *Disability in Medieval Europe*, 11-2 & 20.

<sup>14</sup> Baynton, D. (2001) “Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History”, 52.

<sup>15</sup> Nielsen, K.E. (2008) “Historical Thinking and Disability History” *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 28/3, <<http://dsq-sds.org/issue/view/6>>, consulted on 03/12/2013; Baynton, D. (2008) “Disability in History” *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 28/3, <<http://dsq-sds.org/issue/view/6>>, consulted on 03/12/2013; E.g. disability/deaf studies networks:<<https://networks.h-net.org/h-disability>>;<<http://www.deafhistoryinternational.com/>>; <<http://www.dishist.org/>>. With more than 350 contributors, over 750 articles, and an expansive bibliography, the *Encyclopedia of American Disability History* perfectly illustrates the growing importance of Disability Studies and Disability Histories. Burch, S. (ed.)(2009) *Encyclopedia of American Disability History*. New York: Facts on File.

<sup>16</sup> Kudlick, K. (2003) “Disability History: Why We Need Another Other” *The American Historical Review*, 108/3, 781; Branson, J. & Miller, D. (2002) *Damned for Their Difference: The Cultural Construction of Deaf People as Disabled: A Sociological History*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press.

<sup>17</sup> Hirsch, K. (1998) “Culture and Disability: The Role of Oral History” In: Perk, R. & Thomson, A. (eds.) *The Oral History Reader*. London: Routledge, 418.

These disability experiences have largely been superseded and neglected by a general tendency to put disability on a par with personal tragedy. Moreover, little attempt has been made by historians to disentangle the experiences of 'ordinary' disabled people. Rather, by focusing on extreme or exotic disabled bodies attention has been directed away from the experience of thousands of people whose impairments were less apparent or unusual.<sup>18</sup> By failing to take into consideration this variety of lived experiences, the disability historian runs the risk of overlooking the cultural, social and political factors that construct disability experiences.<sup>19</sup> The emancipatory role of disability history, according to pedagogue Pieter Verstraete, therefore consists in visualizing the variety of lived experiences of people with disabilities.<sup>20</sup>

This variety of experiences, in interaction with a broader framework of economic, political, social and cultural factors, is the focal point of this research. Instead of telling stories of personal tragedy and focusing on what non-disabled benefactors have done for – or to – people with disabilities, this research wants to associate itself with a *new disability history* in which disability is considered a product of the interactions between individuals and political, economic and socio-cultural environments.

## The traditional disability story

Central to most older disability discourses is the assertion that throughout Western history non-disabled people have consistently discriminated against the disabled.<sup>21</sup> Starting from this conception, a *traditional* disability history has taken shape. According this view, from prehistoric times until now, people with an impairment had no place in society. In Antiquity, this was externalized by infanticide, which was well established in Greek and Roman society. In the Middle Ages, poor, sick and disabled people were seen as sufferers, who had to be taken care of. Towards the end of the eighteenth century,

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<sup>18</sup> Turner, D.M. (2012) *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England: Imagining Physical Impairment*. New York: Routledge, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Umansky, L. & Longmore, P.K. (2001) "Introduction: Disability History", 8.

<sup>20</sup> Verstraete, P. (2008) *Disability History: A Foucauldian Perspective*. Leuven: Catholic University Leuven (unpublished PhD dissertation), 42.

<sup>21</sup> Stiker, H.J. (1982) *Corps infirmes et sociétés*. Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 25. For example: Barnes, C. (1996) "Theories of Disability and the Origins of the Oppression of Disabled People in Western Society" In: Barton, L. (ed.) *Disability & Society: Emerging Issues and Insights*. London: Longman, 43-60; Winzer, M.A. (1997) "Disability and Society before the Eighteenth Century. Dread and Despair" In: Davis, L.J. (ed.) *The Disability Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge; Wuyts, B. (1997) "Historische schets van de maatschappelijke positie van mensen met een handicap in de West-Europese samenleving" In: Broekaert, E., De Fever, F., Schoorl, P., Van Hove, G. & Wuyts, B. (eds.) *Orthopedagogiek en maatschappij. Vragen en visies*. Leuven/Apeldoorn: Garant, 35-76.

the attitude towards disabled people came under the influence of the Enlightenment. The belief in progress resulted in attempts to provide a more humane treatment. From the 1850s onwards, however, the educational enthusiasm gave way to a more pessimistic view. Disabled people were increasingly seen as passive and in need of medically supervised institutional care. The connecting thread throughout this story is unambiguously negative: history is dominated by examples of humiliation, marginalization and imprisonment of people with disabilities.

Since the 1990s, this classic tale has generated much criticism. Many assumptions concerning the history of the physically disabled have proven to be derived from research into the history of mental impairments, with the results too easily being equated with the story of people with a physical ailment. Moreover, many authors base their research on secondary works and take over assumptions without questioning them. Such assumptions are too often based on a narrow empirical basis, whereby the past is trivialized to the point “*where it is little more than a reification of the present*”.<sup>22</sup> Disability scholars David Braddock and Susan Parish, for example, attribute the negative image of disability in ancient Greece to nineteenth-century historians, who applied contemporary contempt for people with disabilities to their assessment of the ancient world.<sup>23</sup> The most important criticism, however, focuses on the excessive interest in institutions. Anthropologists Jessica Scheer and Nora Groce rightly pointed out that the practice of institutionalization is a very recent custom, developed only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Northern Europe and the United States.<sup>24</sup> And by focusing only on people with disabilities in institutions, “*we neglect to look for them in other social settings*”.<sup>25</sup>

Characteristic of traditional disability histories is the tendency to locate the problem of disability in the bodies of ‘afflicted’ persons. By defining disability as a pathological condition, the causes of socioeconomic disadvantages of people with an impairment are inevitably individualized: impaired individuals cannot function appropriately within society. Moreover, because these publications operate from the perspective of medical pathology, they typically present people with disabilities as passive. This way of measuring disability denies the influence of external and societal factors in limiting the opportunities for disabled persons to fulfil the “*expected social roles*”.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Gleeson, B. (1997) “Disability Studies: A Historical Materialist View”, 185.

<sup>23</sup> Braddock, D.L. & Parish, S.L. (2001) “An Institutional History of Disability”, 15.

<sup>24</sup> Scheer, J. & Groce, N. (1988) “Impairment as a Human Constant: Cross-Cultural and Historical Perspectives on Variation” *Journal of Social Issues*, 44/1, 32.

<sup>25</sup> Umansky, L. & Longmore, P.K. (2001) “Introduction: Disability History”, 8.

<sup>26</sup> Longmore, P.K. (2003) *Why I Burned My Book and Other Essays on Disability*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 21.



## A new disability history

Moshe Barasch, on the question of whether blindness has a history:

*“As a physiological, hence natural condition blindness knows little change... But while blindness as such remains unchanged, our understanding of blindness, our views concerning its ‘meaning’, are matters of culture... As matters of culture, the interpretation of blindness and the social attitude toward the blind are, of course, prone to historical change.”*<sup>27</sup>

Since the 1980s, as a reaction to traditional disability history, several scholars have endeavoured to write a new disability history of people with a physical impairment. Opinions on existing histories were indeed harsh: there was scarcely anything, and the existing works “*serve[d] paradoxically to produce an understanding of handicap which was an ahistorical one*”.<sup>28</sup> Anthropological studies of non-Western cultures had shown that the dominant approach of constant marginalization of people with a physical impairment was not natural and timeless, as was assumed in traditional disability studies.<sup>29</sup> Scheer and Groce stated in 1988 that “*all human societies have always had disabled members. [But] while the presence of such individuals is a constant, culturally shared responses to them vary greatly across time and social context*”.<sup>30</sup> More and more authors therefore called for and still plea for a shift in focus to the social context in which people with an impairment live. Disability is indeed primarily a social rather than a physical problem, stated the historian and disability activist Paul Longmore. While the medical model, which has shaped classic disability histories, considered disability as a series of physiological, psychological and functional pathologies located within the bodies of individuals, the social model of disability argued that for most disabled people, most of the time “*the greatest limitations are not somatic but social: prejudice and discrimination, inaccessibility and lack of accommodations*”.<sup>31</sup> Like race, disability is usually seen as fixed in biology, but in fact it is an ambiguous and variable concept that shifts over time and from culture to culture.<sup>32</sup>

Accepting disability as a social construct, many scholars focus on the nineteenth century as the period in which the attitudes towards and the living conditions of the disabled underwent important changes. By now, it is believed within historiography that in the last two centuries, under the influence of industrialization and medicalization, the

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<sup>27</sup> Barasch, M. (2001) *Blindness: the History of a Mental Image in Western Thought*. New York: Routledge, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Abberley, P. (1985) *Policing Cripples: Social Theory and Physical Handicap*. Unpublished paper, Bristol Polytechnic, 9. Cited in Gleeson, B.J. (1997) “Disability Studies: A Historical Materialist View”, 185.

<sup>29</sup> Ingstad, B. & Reynolds Whyte, S. (eds.) (1995) *Disability and Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 6.

<sup>30</sup> Scheer, J. & Groce, N. (1988) “Impairment as a Human Constant”, 23.

<sup>31</sup> Longmore, P.K. (2003) *Why I Burned My Book*, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Baynton, D.C. (2004) “Disability History: No Longer Hidden” *Reviews in American History*, 32/2, 285.

social position of people with a disability came under serious threat.<sup>33</sup> As part of this segregation process, an evolution is assumed from informal care from relatives and the extended family to institutions, established by the state. The early modern family had been a unit of production with all its members recognized as part of the productive process. But as industrialization continued, the concept of production began to involve the employment of labour power rather than people and ‘unproductive’ members of the family were increasingly seen as a burden.<sup>34</sup> "Disabled people came to be regarded as a social and educational problem and were more and more segregated in institutions of all kinds [...], and out of the mainstream of social life".<sup>35</sup>

## Disability history in Belgium

In Belgium, research into the history of people with disabilities is still very much in its infancy. As with international research, publications from a disability history perspective have mainly focused on the history of people with intellectual disabilities.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, attention to people with a physical impairment in the past has been limited to rather popularizing works, or to a mainly theoretical debate. The social position of people with impairments in history is the focal point in the publications of historian Ben Wuyts.<sup>37</sup> Based solely on secondary literature, however, his writings are primarily intended for a non-academic audience. Bart Demuynck, pedagogue and archivist of the Archives Charles-Louis Carton, has published on the history of Flemish deaf education,

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<sup>33</sup> E.g. Barnes, C. (1996) "Theories of Disability and the Origins of the Oppression of Disabled People in Western Society" In: Barton, L. (ed.) *Disability & Society: Emerging Issues and Insights*. London: Longman, 43-60; Covey, H.C. (1998) *Social Perceptions of People with Disabilities in History*. Springfield: Charles C. Thomas; Gleeson, B. (1999) *Geographies of Disability*. London: Routledge.

<sup>34</sup> Branson, J. & Miller, D. (2002) *Damned for Their Difference*, 9.

<sup>35</sup> Oliver, M. (1990) *The Politics of Disablement*, 28.

<sup>36</sup> E.g. Beek, H.H. (1969) *Waanzin in de Middeleeuwen. Beeld van de gestoorde en bemoeienis met de zieke*. Antwerp: Garant; Ter Haar, A. (1992) *Gewoon in beeld. Visies op de beeldvorming over mensen met een verstandelijke handicap*. Leuven: Garant; Lis, C. & Soly, H. (1990) *Te gek om los te lopen? Collocatie in de 18<sup>de</sup> eeuw*. Turnhout: Brepols; Allegaert, P. (1994) *Doodgezwegen: experimenten en moord op krankzinnigen en andere 'onwaardigen' in Nazi-Duitsland*. Ghent: Museum dr. Guislain; Van Hove, G. (2000) "Geschiedenis van de zorg voor personen met een verstandelijke handicap" In: Broekaert, E. (ed.) *Handboek bijzondere orthopedagogiek*. Leuven: Garant, 17-24; Stockman, R. (2000) *Van nar tot patiënt. Een geschiedenis van de zorg voor geesteszieken*. Leuven: Davidsfonds.

<sup>37</sup> Wuyts, B. (1997) "Historische schets van de maatschappelijke positie van mensen met een handicap in de West-Europese samenleving"; Wuyts, B. (2005) *Over narren, kreupelen, doven en blinden. Leven met een handicap van de Oudheid tot nu*. Leuven: Davidsfonds.

in particular of the Spermalie Institute in Bruges (1836-).<sup>38</sup> A more scientific approach to disability can be found in the publications of anthropologist and pedagogue Patrick Devlieger and pedagogue Pieter Verstraete, both affiliated with the University of Leuven. Devlieger is interested in the social and cultural aspects of disability in Europe, Africa and the United States. Verstraete advocates the importance of disability as a productive tool within a historical- and philosophical-pedagogical research tradition. He mainly works on the care for and representation of persons with disabilities from a historical and theoretical perspective.<sup>39</sup> Most historical approaches to disability focus on the development of special education and institutions for the disabled in Belgium.<sup>40</sup>

In the last decade some Belgian scholars have attempted to study the lives of disabled people in the past from a more empirical perspective. Classical philologist Christian Laes has studied the social and cultural history of Antiquity, paying particular attention to the human life course, including that of the disabled.<sup>41</sup> Two master's theses are also worth mentioning in this regard. In 2003 Tom De Paepe studied the life courses of East Flemish men with different disabilities in the nineteenth century on the basis of military conscription lists.<sup>42</sup> In 2008 Els Van Brantegem undertook a social-demographic study into the lives of a group of nineteenth-century deaf and blind persons. Based on individual bulletins and military conscription lists as well as civil and population registers, Van Brantegem was able to identify and reconstruct the life courses of a small number of deaf and blind individuals.<sup>43</sup> Despite their limited scope, these studies illustrated the possibilities for future disability research, not least for this research project.

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<sup>38</sup> In 1836, Charles-Louis Carton, a Belgian priest, founded a deaf school in Bruges and a religious congregation (the Sisters of the Childhood of Mary) who managed the school. Demuynck, B. (2009) *Hulpmiddelen met een geschiedenis (1800-1985) Doven en Blindeninstituut Spermalie*. Bruges: Archief Charles-Louis Carton; Demuynck, B. (2011) "175 jaar doven- en blindeninstituut in West-Vlaanderen" *Biekorf*, 111/4, 419-437.

<sup>39</sup> A list of the publications by P. Devlieger can be found at: <<https://lirias.kuleuven.be/cv?u=U0012724>>. Verstraete, P. (2008) *Disability History: A Foucauldian Perspective*; Verstraete, P. & Hellinckx, W. (2009) *Met een handicap naar school. Het ontstaan en de ontwikkeling van het onderwijs aan kinderen en jongeren met een handicap (1750-1950)*. Ieper: Vredestad Ieper; Verstraete, P. (2012) *In the Shadow of Disability. Reconnecting History, Identity and Politics*. Toronto: Barbara Budrich Publishers. More of Verstraete's publications are mentioned later on.

<sup>40</sup> Rietveld-Van Wingerden, M. (2004) *Zorgenkinderen in beeld: facetten van de orthopedagogische praktijk in Nederland en België in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw*. Assen: Van Gorcum; Buyens, M. (2005) *De dove persoon, zijn gebarentaal en het dovenonderwijs*. Antwerp: Garant; Beelaert, B., Bruyneel, C. & Leeman, K. (2009) *Vive la parole? Mi-laan 1880 als scharniermoment in het dovenonderwijs*. Ghent: Fevlado-Diversus.

<sup>41</sup> E.g. Laes, C. (2011) "Silent Witnesses: Deaf-mutes in Graeco-Roman Antiquity" *Classical world*, 104/4, 451-73; Laes, C. (2011) "How Does one Do the History of Disability in Antiquity? One Thousand Years of Case Studies" *Medicina nei Secoli*, 23/3, 915-46.

<sup>42</sup> De Paepe, T. (2003) *Oost-Vlaamse mannen met een handicap in de 19de eeuw. Een sociaal-demografisch onderzoek op basis van de conscriptieregisters*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished master's dissertation).

<sup>43</sup> Van Brantegem, E. (2008) *Een sociaal-demografische analyse naar doven en blinden in de 19e eeuw*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished master's dissertation).

## Research focus and design

The central thesis that shapes this research is the assumption that the changing social and economic conditions during the nineteenth century, coupled with the increased medical interpretation of disabilities, contributed to a rising segregation, stigmatization and institutionalization of persons with disabilities. According to Oliver, people with an impairment were relatively well integrated within the early modern community and family.<sup>44</sup> With the industrial revolution and the medicalization process, however, the social position of people with a disability came under serious threat. From that point onwards, the great majority of disabled persons would not have had an occupation, but were instead faced with limited social interaction and exclusion. Their lives were severely limited by widely held beliefs and superstitions that were used to justify the pervasive prejudice and callous treatment. However, it was just that congregation of people with similar disabilities for treatment and services that enabled the development of a group identity and disabled community, which ultimately facilitated the rise of political activism in the twentieth century, according to Braddock and Parish.<sup>45</sup>

These hypotheses, however, have rarely been tested by social historical research that centres on the everyday experiences of people with impairments in the past. Focusing on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century East Flanders, this research aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which the lives of people with an auditory impairment were shaped. On the one hand, this dissertation explores the ways in which a variety of social, cultural, medical and economic characteristics – also known as environmental factors – had an impact on experiences of impairment. On the other hand, attempts are made to uncover more individual responses to impairment and issues of individual agency. By analysing general patterns and developments alongside an in-depth study of the biographies of ordinary and extraordinary life courses, a more nuanced picture of disability history emerges, in which the bigger stories of oppression are balanced by the experiences of disabled people as active agents.

### The deaf in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century East Flanders

Every study within the field of disability history is fated to be a study in which a great deal is missing. The experiences of a group of disabled people in the past cannot be cap-

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<sup>44</sup> Oliver, M. (1990) *The Politics of Disablement*.

<sup>45</sup> Braddock, D.L. & Parish, S.L. (2001) "An Institutional History of Disability", 11.

tured in 400 pages without making some generalizations and compromises on the personal stories that could be told. The feasibility of this research required a clear delineation, and therefore concessions in terms of the period, region and population under observation.

In this research, I focus on deaf men and women who lived between ca. 1750-1950 in the province of East Flanders, situated in the Southern Low Countries, Belgium from 1830 onwards. The timeframe, 1750-1950, dovetails with the literature in which the transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century is presented as the period in which attitudes towards people with a disability were undergoing change. The scarcity of sources for identifying disabled persons prior to 1750 as well as the stringent privacy legislation covering the consultation of personal records of a more recent period prevented me from extending the research before and beyond this timeframe. Geographically, I restricted the research to the province of East Flanders. The Belgian province of East Flanders is a pre-eminent case study to test the hypothesis as over the course of the nineteenth century the region shifted from an economic system of cottage industry to a more industrial economy. The province's capital of Ghent became the indisputable industrial leader on the European mainland in the first half of the nineteenth century. Moreover, the research benefitted from a reconstruction of the frequency of different physical impairments in the military conscription registers for this region.<sup>46</sup> Historical research is also dependent on the sources available. For the province of East Flanders, unique sources were found for the identification of people with an auditory disability in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As the design of the research entailed the use of sources that are preserved at the municipal level, practical considerations also played their part.

There is more documentation on the deaf in the Early Modern Period than on people suffering from any other condition. Deaf people have been and continue to be the focus of intensive academic, educational, and medical attention and debate.<sup>47</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century, schools for the deaf had been established throughout Europe and the first important publications concerning deafness had appeared in print.<sup>48</sup> In today's literature as well, the deaf have a prominent place in disability studies.<sup>49</sup> So the selection of deaf people was made on practical grounds, but it also raises the question: 'Why was deafness such a point of fascination?'

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<sup>46</sup> De Paepe, T. (2003) *Oost-Vlaamse mannen met een handicap*.

<sup>47</sup> Branson, J. & Miller, D. (2002) *Damned for Their Difference*, 59.

<sup>48</sup> Davis, L.J. (1995) *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body*. London: New Left Books, 50-4.

<sup>49</sup> Burch, S. & Kafer, A. (2010) *Deaf and Disability Studies: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press.

The explanation probably lies in the ambivalent position of the deaf in the past and present. Sociologist Paul Higgins points to the ongoing debate since Antiquity in which philosophers have tried to define what makes humans human. In its early Greek form, the dominant attitude towards deaf people was based on the argument: thinking cannot develop without language. Language, in turn, cannot develop without speech. Speech cannot develop without hearing. Therefore, those who cannot hear cannot think.<sup>50</sup> Professor of Deaf Studies Jan Branson and anthropologist Don Miller also describe how the link between language and humanity played a vital part in the marginalization of deaf people because language, above all else, was seen to set humans apart from animals. Thus those without speech were frequently labelled as ‘mindless’, as less than human. Those who were deaf were assumed to be incapable of human understanding, hence the frequent use of the term ‘deaf and dumb’, which in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries meant ‘deaf and stupid’.<sup>51</sup> Ideas about the relationship between the ability to hear and think, and as a consequence of the incompetence of the deaf, strongly influenced the ways in which non-disabled persons acted towards the deaf in everyday life. For much of history the deaf have not been allowed to own property, act as witnesses, or be validly married, but neither could they be punished if they or their animals injured someone. Whether they were denied legal rights or paternalistically cared for, the deaf were treated as incompetent. Gradually but by no means completely, together with the onset of small-scale initiatives throughout Europe to educate the deaf from the seventeenth century onwards, the assumption that the deaf could not think gave way to less extreme views of their incompetence. Deaf people began to be viewed as an unfortunate and dependent group of people, and not solely as incapable of thinking.<sup>52</sup> In today’s society, the deaf still form a special group within the disabled community, as scholars and disability activists debate over whether deaf people, communicating with their own language, should be seen as disabled or rather a linguistic minority (*infra*).

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<sup>50</sup> Higgins, P.C. (1980) *Outsiders in a Hearing World*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 23-4.

<sup>51</sup> Branson, J. & Miller, D. (2002) *Damned for Their Difference*, 25.

<sup>52</sup> Higgins, P.C. (1980) *Outsiders in a Hearing World*, 25-6. In Antiquity deaf people unable to speak were denied legal rights. They could not make wills, grant freedom to slaves, act as witnesses of wills and required a guardian to supervise their affairs. Laes, C. (2013) “Silent History? Speech Impairment in Roman Antiquity” In: Laes, C., Goodey, C. & Rose, M.L. (eds.) *Disabilities in Roman Antiquity: Disparate Bodies a Capite ad Calcem*. Leiden: Brill, 153. In the Middle Ages, we find a reaffirmation of these ideas. Philippe de Beaumanoir wrote in 1283: “because a mute person cannot make an [legal] agreement since he cannot speak, and an agreement cannot be made without words; nor can a deaf person, since he cannot hear the agreement.” Pfau, A. (2010) “Protecting or Restraining? Madness as a Disability in Late Medieval France” In: Eyler, J.R. (ed.) *Disability in the Middle Ages: Reconsiderations and Reverberations*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 93. Similarly, early nineteenth-century laws in America prohibited deaf people from voting or to making a contract. E.g. Peet, H.P. (1857) *On the Legal Rights and Responsibilities of the Deaf and Dumb*. Richmond: C.H. Wynne’s steam-power presses.

This research is based on a research group of 284 deaf men and women born between 1748 and 1860. National censuses indicate that nineteenth-century East Flanders had on average 344 deaf individuals in its population (see 2.2.2.1). There is no reason to suspect that this was any different in the eighteenth century. As such, the research group offers a significant sample of the entire deaf population in the province.

## **An empirical research on collective experiences and individual agency**

Although many studies are devoted to deafness, the deaf themselves very often remain out of sight. Nearly all studies on the history of the deaf describe the origin of education for the deaf and react to the debate over sign language and speech.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, the representation of the deaf in the literature is characterized by a dichotomy: on the one hand they are presented as *active agents*, and on the other as *passive victims* of a medical condition.<sup>54</sup> Wuyts described people with a disability as “outside their will, affected by their impairment. They carry the status of ‘incomplete’, or deficient humans. They undergo discrimination, and in more recent times, charitable paternalism and a benign patronizing treatment by society”.<sup>55</sup> According to historian Susan Burch, however, deaf people played an active role in their own history.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, few have placed deaf people’s own voices and experiences at the centre of that history.

Most older histories of the deaf put emphasis on the benevolence of those regarded as the real historical agents: the hearing professionals and philanthropists.<sup>57</sup> As a result, disability history is reduced to biographical histories that tell the stories of male reformers and praise the institutions with which they were often connected.<sup>58</sup> Taking into account the experiences of disabled persons has been identified as one of the greatest challenges for disability historians.

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<sup>53</sup> E.g. Plann, S. (1997) *A Silent Minority: Deaf Education in Spain, 1550-1835*. Berkeley: University of California Press; Buyens, M. (2005) *De dove persoon, zijn gebarentaal en het dovenonderwijs*. Antwerp: Garant.

<sup>54</sup> Kudlick, K. (2003) “Disability History”, 781; Longmore, P. & Umansky, L. (2001) “Introduction: Disability History”, 7-8.

<sup>55</sup> Wuyts, B. (1997) “Historische schets van de maatschappelijke positie”, 37.

<sup>56</sup> Burch, S. (2002) *Signs of Resistance*, 5.

<sup>57</sup> Longmore, P.K. (2003) *Why I Burned My Book*, 55.

<sup>58</sup> Borsay, A. (2005) *Disability and Social Policy in Britain since 1750*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 10.

In this research I want to take up this challenge with an empirical research into people with a hearing disability, in which space is made for individual differences and attention is paid to historical agency. In this work I firmly repudiate a medical perspective on disability which focuses on individual deficits and equates disability with a personal tragedy, thereby rendering disabled people historically inert or invisible. Disability is not considered as an isolated, individual medical pathology, but instead as a socially and culturally constructed identity – on a par with race, class and gender.<sup>59</sup> Rather than concentrating on the individual, I aim to focus on the social, economic, political and cultural factors in the development of disability. Deafness cannot be reduced to the supposed silence in the head of a deaf person. On the contrary, “*to fully appreciate the experience of disability in current society and social policy as a response to it, an understanding of history and its relationship to culture is vital*”.<sup>60</sup>

Using disability as an analytical framework implies that we ask questions about definitions of *fit* and *unfit* bodies, and the consequences of these definitions for social relationships, legal institutions, education, medicine and social welfare. Research on disability is in fact a contribution to research on inequality and therefore<sup>61</sup> at the heart of social history. It offers more insight into the manner in which communities function according to processes of exclusion and inclusion. Disability is crucial for understanding how Western cultures determine hierarchies and maintain social order as well as how they define progress.<sup>62</sup>

## Research questions and strategy

The central hypothesis of an increasing segregation, stigmatization and institutionalization of persons with disabilities in the course of the nineteenth century is operationalized in terms of two research questions: first, to what extent did the lives of the deaf differ from the non-deaf population? And second, in what way were their life courses influenced by nineteenth-century developments? This double research question is tackled with a historical demographic study based on the life course methodology. Life

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<sup>59</sup> Kudlick, K. (2003) “Disability History”, 764; Longmore, P. & Umansky, L. (2001) “Introduction: Disability History”, 8.

<sup>60</sup> Verstraete, P. (2008) *Disability History: A Foucauldian Perspective*, 11.

<sup>61</sup> Nielsen, K. (2008) “Historical Thinking and Disability History” *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 28/3, <<http://dsq-sds.org/issue/view/6>>, consulted on 04/12/2013.

<sup>62</sup> Kudlick, K. (2003) “Disability History”, 769.



course analysis involves following a group of people throughout their lives to distinguish patterns and 'average' life trajectories of people with shared characteristics.

The first research question required comparing the lives of a group of deaf and non-deaf persons from the same generation. Deciding on a representative control group required some consideration. When randomly choosing people one runs the risk of making a distorted selection, which is difficult to compare with the cohort of deaf persons – for example because the control group consists of people from a different strata of society. To avoid this risk, I have chosen to select one of the siblings of each deaf person. As siblings grew up in the same environment as the deaf research individuals, the side effects of different early life characteristics potentially influencing future life trajectories is minimized, which increases the comparability of the deaf and non-deaf cohort.

The second part of the research question involves a comparison of two generations of deaf individuals to reveal potential developments through time. Based on the sources, I have delineated two birth cohorts within the deaf and non-deaf population. The men and women in this research were either born between 1748 and 1810, or between 1830 and 1860. The distinction between the two birth cohorts runs alongside the industrial development of Belgium and can be considered to divide the research population into a pre-industrial and industrial cohort.

How do you measure the differences between deaf people and hearing people and a deterioration in the extent of integration of the deaf? Disability theorists Colin Barnes, Geoff Mercer and political scientist Tom Shakespeare distinguish four disabling barriers that prevent people with disabilities from fully participating in society: membership and access to family life, educational opportunities, access to and organization of employment as well as buildings and infrastructure, and housing and transport facilities.<sup>63</sup> Social policy scholar Sally Sainsbury, in her contemporary study of integration and segregation of the deaf, takes into consideration a wide variety of topics, ranging from personal characteristics, ways of communication, the care setting and the formal network of services to features of the living space, the importance of family, friends and neighbourhood, the access to education, organization of employment and income, and the possibilities for leisure.<sup>64</sup> A historical study has to deal with the limitations of the sources available. The opportunities to develop this study alongside the same topics as contemporary studies into integration are therefore restricted. Nevertheless, the combination of quantitative and qualitative sources enables an in-depth study of deaf lives.

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<sup>63</sup> Barnes, C., Mercer, G. & Shakespeare, T. (1999) *Exploring Disability. A Sociological Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

<sup>64</sup> Sainsbury, S. (1986) *Deaf Worlds: A Study of Integration, Segregation and Disability*. London: Hutchinson.

In line with contemporary studies into integration, the two research questions are dealt with alongside four themes, based on the key events or characteristics in a person's life course. This research then analyses the differences in the two time periods and between research groups (deaf-hearing) with regard to: 1) employment and poverty, 2) marriage and family life, 3) physical and social mobility, and 4) formal care, old age and mortality. As an introduction to these topics, I look into the childhood experiences of deaf children. A deterioration in the extent to which deaf individuals lived an integrated life in the course of the nineteenth century may be reflected in a decrease in the number of deaf people who got married, had children, and found employment. An increasing segregation would also become apparent in an increase in the number of deaf people living in segregated communities or institutions. A thesis related to the *segregation* thesis is the assumption that the congregation of people with similar disabilities for treatment and services also made possible the development of group identities. Education professor Margret Winzer states that by the close of the nineteenth century, deaf persons in America and Canada started to advocate manual education and control of their own schools.<sup>65</sup> It is interesting to explore whether similar developments took place in Belgium. The development of a group identity among the research population could have found expression in an increasing number of deaf marriages (deaf man-deaf woman), or the expansion of the social contacts between deaf individuals.

By comparing key moments in the lives of a group of people with and without a hearing impairment and from two different generations, one can determine the impact of an impairment on the daily lived experiences of a person. However, it is important to note that the lives of people can also differ due to personal and environmental factors, other than the presence of an impairment.<sup>66</sup>

Perceptions and experiences of disability were dependent on gender, according to historian David Turner. Disabled men were much more visible in eighteenth-century society than disabled women. On the one hand, this might be the result of a bias in the historical sources towards men. On the other hand, it might also be related to the prevailing ideas about disability. Since Antiquity, femininity has been considered a defect in itself, resulting from the Aristotelian notion of women as 'botched' men. Women's social disabilities, such as having no rights to own property within marriage and their unequal inheritance rights, were therefore deemed 'natural' and less likely to draw attention. Moreover, as men were considered to be more actively engaged in the world, issues of *competence* were more directly applicable to men. Disability and gender history are

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<sup>65</sup> Winzer, M.A. (1993) *The History of Special Education: From Isolation to Integration*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press.

<sup>66</sup> Longmore, P.K. (2003) *Why I Burned My Book*, 11.

therefore inextricably linked.<sup>67</sup> The environment in which an individual lived might have influenced experiences of disablement as well. It seems logical that deviant or atypical personal characteristics that may have gradually become familiar in a small community appeared bizarre or disturbing in an urban environment. In urban settings, strengthened through the nineteenth-century process of urbanization, the pressure on disabled people to mould their own appearance in a manner that would enable them to fit into a community of strangers was presumably higher.<sup>68</sup> In a similar way, disability research needs to address issues of social class, religion and personal background to obtain a diversified image of disability experience.<sup>69</sup>

Using the life course as a conceptual framework is in this respect a productive approach, because it forces its users to consider a wider range of issues, affecting people at all points of life, rather than just focusing on those that are relevant to only a minority.<sup>70</sup> Life course analysis makes it possible to investigate the interaction between the individual life course and the demographic, economic, institutional and cultural circumstances, as well as the extent to which individuals controlled their life courses themselves. This dissertation aims to highlight the importance of gender, environment, social class, household composition and other social variables in the experience of disability. The implementation of bivariate and multivariate analysis techniques will help to determine the impact of these different characteristics.

Besides personal and environmental factors on a group level, it is crucial to take into account the different experiences of disabled persons and aspects of historical agency to avoid a treatment of deaf people as a single, clearly defined group. Within the constraints and possibilities of their world, people make choices that construct their life course. However, given the impossibility of interviews and the lack of other personal information, how are we to assess capacities and life choices of individuals in the life course analysis? Historical demographer Jan Kok stresses the need to place people carefully within their historical and local contexts, which implies a thorough knowledge of their general cultural preferences and behavioural routines. This allows the construc-

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<sup>67</sup> Turner, David M. (2012) *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England*, 9.

<sup>68</sup> Hahn, H. (1987) "Advertising the Acceptably Employable Image. Disability and Capitalism" *Policy Studies Journal*, 15/3, 558.

<sup>69</sup> Less relevant for this study, but equally important is the relationship between disability and race and ethnicity. Susan Burch and Hannah Joyner's *Unspeakable: The Story of Junius Wilson* (2007) provides an excellent example of how deafness is entangled with race, class and gender. By telling the story of Junius Wilson, a deaf African-American man (1908-2001) who spent 67 years at a state mental hospital in Goldsboro (North Carolina), they address broader issues of segregation as experienced by African-Americans, as well as by deaf persons and the continuing impact of intersectional forms of discrimination. Burch, S. & Joyner, H. (2007) *Unspeakable: The Story of Junius Wilson*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

<sup>70</sup> Priestley, M. (2003) *Disability. A Life Course Approach*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 25-7.

tion of hypotheses about the most likely goals of individuals and families, given their resources and their options. “By following their behavioural choices across the life course, keeping an eye both on past individual experiences and on the interactions with historical influences, it can be tested under what circumstances these hypothesized goals were realized and when they were modified”. This implies an integration of qualitative information concerning general mentality, adherence to religious prescriptions, knowledge of alternative options, frames of references for evaluating living standards, nature of relations with parents and siblings, attitudes towards risks, etc (see 2.2.2).<sup>71</sup>

## Some considerations

Several scholars have pointed out the challenges and limitations that are associated with doing (historical) disability research.<sup>72</sup> Here I want to consider two issues important in all disability research and crucial for the general interpretation and outline of this study.<sup>73</sup>

A first consideration when doing disability research is that one has to deal with the controversies surrounding the importance of language.<sup>74</sup> There are debates in various countries on the preferred terminology for disabled people. In the United States, the terms *people with disabilities* and *disabled people* each have their proponents and opponents. The group advocating the first term aims to emphasize the importance of the individual. By placing *people* before *disability*, they want to stress that disability is something that is not inherent in a person. A second group prefers the term *disabled people* as they want to stress the shared identity of the group. In the United Kingdom as well, the concept of *disabled people* is used to signify the importance of a group identity and a shared oppression. In France (*les handicapés*) and Spain (*inhabilidad*), the emphasis is on the constraints imposed on groups of individuals, whether as a result of environmental reactions or

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<sup>71</sup> Kok, J. (2007) “Principles and Prospects of the Life Course Paradigm” *Annales de Démographie Historique*, 1, 214-5.

<sup>72</sup> For example: Braddock, D.L. & Parish, S.L. (2001) “An Institutional History of Disability”; Bredberg, E. (1999) “Writing Disability History: Problems, Perspectives and Sources” *Disability and Society*, 14/2, 189-201.

<sup>73</sup> Difficulties more specifically related to this research project are discussed in Chapter 2.

<sup>74</sup> For a more detailed discussion on the terminology of disability, I refer to: Linton, S. (1998) *Claiming Disability. Knowledge and Identity*. New York: New York University Press.

health conditions.<sup>75</sup> In Belgium, associations advocate the term *people with a handicap* or *persons with a disability* - by analogy *persons with an auditory disability* or *people who are deaf*. When doing historical disability research language issues become even more apparent. *Disabled people* as a distinct group in society and *disability* as an umbrella concept for the different types of impairments are products of the twentieth century. Therefore, as Turner concludes, writing a disability history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries implies writing the history of a group of people whose disability did not exist in the modern sense. The contemporary distinction between impairment and its social consequences probably made little sense in past societies. Nonetheless, although the notion of disability reflects modern ways of thinking about bodily differences, according to historian Roger Cooter “a social, economic or even medical concept of disability could have existed in the absence of the word”.<sup>76</sup> The anachronistic concept of disability is utilized in this research as a way to address the “*anomalous body’s relationship to the cultural environment*”.<sup>77</sup>

In the absence of modern concepts, individuals in the past turned to less ethical and more direct concepts to describe a wide variety of physical impairments. While today different types of impairments each have their own terminology and definitions, expressions as ‘cripple’ and ‘idiot’ were used to cover a wide range of disabilities up until the beginning of the twentieth century. People with an auditory disability were referred to as ‘deaf and dumb’ or ‘deaf-mute’, suggesting that the inability to hear was automatically accompanied by mental deficiencies and a lack of speech. Depending on the argument, this research combines contemporary and historical concepts to describe the research population. Based on practical considerations, the research population is often referred to as ‘the deaf’ or ‘they’. By no means does the use of this term imply that all persons with an auditory disability belong to a distinct entity without any consideration for individual differences. ‘They’ is preferred over the clumsy ‘he and/or she’, and certainly preferable to the biased ‘he’.

Not only is the terminology of disability in constant flux, but defining what constitutes disability is also challenging. As Turner observes “*impairment is not trans-historical*”. The interpretation of an impairment in the past and present is determined by the interaction of medical views within a specific social, cultural and economic framework.<sup>78</sup> What is considered a disability is determined by the prevailing norms and interpreta-

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<sup>75</sup> Albrecht, G.L., Seelman, K.D. & Bury, M. (2001) “Introduction: The Formation of Disability Studies” In: Seelman, K.D., Albrecht, G.L. & Bury, M. (eds.) *Handbook of Disability Studies*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1-10.

<sup>76</sup> Cooter, R. (2000) “The Disabled body” In: Cooter, R. & Pickstone, J. (eds.) *Companion to Medicine in the Twentieth Century*. London: Routledge, 370.

<sup>77</sup> Turner, D.M. (2012) *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England*, 11-2.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*.

tions about normalization on the basis of which some forms of human variation are considered a functional limitation, whereas others are considered 'normal'. Some scholars point to the access to employment as the most important criterion for distinguishing between people with disabilities and the non-disabled from the nineteenth century onwards. With the onset of industrialization, many people were marginalized as the new machines and infrastructure were designed for the normative worker.<sup>79</sup> While moderate hearing loss (or unilateral deafness) was not considered an obstacle to most employment, severe deafness was.<sup>80</sup> Turner points to the importance of personal factors in the interpretation of an impairment as disabling. While he considers work to be an important factor in a popular perception of what it meant to be disabled, it cannot capture the wide range of experiences of impairment. More specifically, he refers to the role of the family in the care and support of disabled relatives, where the presence of an impairment was no reason to treat a person differently.<sup>81</sup> Metzler suggests defining disability through an index of visibility. She declares that the more noticeable an impairment is to others, the more it is regarded as a disability.<sup>82</sup> A person characterized by a less visible impairment, such as a deaf person, is therefore less likely to suffer from the negative cultural and social consequences of their impairment. Contemporary eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature, however, depicts a different image as the deaf are often described as "*those most unfortunate beings who, by the deficiency of a single sense, seem to have been rendered, in a great measure, outcasts from society.*"<sup>83</sup> Although the labelling of deaf people as disabled is under discussion nowadays, historical evidence suggests a shared belief in the disabling impact of prelingual deafness in past societies (infra).

A second consideration relates to the peculiarity of the deaf in relation to other disability groups and to the disabled as a whole. Histories of disability rarely take on a cross-disability perspective that is representative of the historical connections across mental, physical and sensory disabilities.<sup>84</sup> Reconstructing the life courses of a research population characterized by different types of impairments could contribute greatly to the knowledge of the similarities and differences in the experience of disablement in the

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<sup>79</sup> The notion of the disabling effect of employment can also be found in the works of: Finkelstein, V. (1981) "Disability and the Helper/Helped Relationship. An Historical View" In: Liddiard, P., Brechin, A. & Swain, J. (eds.) *Handicap in a Social World: A Reader*. Sevenoaks: Hodder and Stoughton, 12-22; Oliver, M. (1990) *The Politics of Disablement*; Abberley, P. (1987) "The Concept of Oppression and the Development of a Social Theory of Disability" *Disability, Handicap & Society*, 2/1, 5-19.

<sup>80</sup> Harlan, L.L. (2002) "Do Deaf People Have a Disability", 358-9.

<sup>81</sup> Turner, David M. (2012) *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England*, 144.

<sup>82</sup> Metzler, I. (2006) *Disability in Medieval Europe*, 3-4.

<sup>83</sup> Burnett, J.R. (1835) *Tales of the Deaf and Dumb: With Miscellaneous Poems*. Newark: B. Olds, 2.

<sup>84</sup> Braddock, D.L., Parish, S.L.(2001) "An Institutional History of Disability", 12.

past. The time-consuming nature of life course data collection, however, puts a limit on the dimensions of the research population. Integrating people with various impairments into this research, without the possibility of expanding the number of people under observation, would result in a patchwork of barely representative disability groups.

The question then remains as to what extent the results of a case study of deaf lives can be translated to the experiences of other disability groups or allow us to make generalizations about 'the disabled'. This consideration touches on an ongoing debate within disability and deaf studies about the issue of whether deafness should be considered a disability or not. On the one hand, from a general hearing perspective, the deaf population is presumed to be part of the larger disabled population because they lack the ability to hear and communicate like the hearing majority in any given society.<sup>85</sup> Psychologist Harlane Lane speaks of a "disability construction" in which "deafness is associated with the absence of hearing, silence, individual suffering, personal incapacities, and achievement in overcoming great obstacles."<sup>86</sup> On the other hand, as sociologists Sharon Barnartt and Richard Scotch point out, many deaf people see themselves as part of a minority culture, and consider deafness not to be a disability at all. In contrast, it is considered simply an alternative way of communicating: "in the minority construction, deafness is associated with a unique language, history, culture, social group, set of institutions."<sup>87</sup>

The choice for a deaf research population to test the hypothesis of a nineteenth-century deterioration in the lives of the disabled implies the implicit recognition of individuals with a hearing impairment as disabled. I believe this equation to be justified, especially within a historical framework. In line with Barnartt and Scotch, I argue that deafness and disability share many features. Both groups have been regarded as being best handled by medical experts, both have been marginalized and perceived as abnor-

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<sup>85</sup> Quartararo, A.T. (2008) *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 2-3.

<sup>86</sup> Lane, H. (1993) "Construction of Deafness" In: Garretson, M.D. (ed.) *Deafness: 1993-2013*. Silver Spring: National Association of the Deaf, 74.

<sup>87</sup> The deaf community today denies the label of 'disabled' and rejects the suggestion that they have an impairment or a disability. Instead the deaf have embraced the term 'Deaf', with a capital D. 'Deaf' refers to "a member of a linguistic and cultural minority with distinctive mores, attitudes and values and a distinctive physical constitution." For an introduction to this debate, I refer to: Harlan, L.L. (2002) "Do Deaf People Have a Disability", 356-79; Bruggeman, B.J. (2009) *Deaf Subjects: Identities and Places*. New York: New York University Press; Foster, S. (2003) "Examining the Fit between Deafness and Disability" In: Devlieger, P., Rusch, F. & Pfeiffer, D. (eds.) *Rethinking Disability. The Emergence of New Definitions, Concepts and Communities*. Antwerp: Garant, 111-30; Barnartt, S. & Scotch, R. (2002) *Disability Protests: Contentious Politics 1970-1999*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press, XIX-XI. O. Robinson showed that already in the late nineteenth century, deaf people wanted to distinguish themselves from people with other disabilities. Robinson, O.E. (2010) "'We Are of a Different Class' Ableist Rhetoric in Deaf America, 1880-1920" In: Burch, S. & Kafer, A. (eds.) *Deaf and Disability Studies: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 5-21.

mal. As individuals with other types of impairments, deaf people have been faced with social situations in which they found themselves in some way disabled.<sup>88</sup> Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writings confirm that individuals with hearing impairments were perceived as different and deprived of chances to live an ordinary life.<sup>89</sup> However, considering deafness to have a disabling impact on a person's life is not to deny the presence of a deaf culture and community, nor the fact that the barriers that existed for deaf people were different from those faced by people with other types of impairments. Historical studies into different types of disabilities suggests that the perception, context and experiences of individuals characterized by different disabilities differed.<sup>90</sup> Therefore, I do not claim that the findings of this research are representative of experiences of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century disablement. This research, moreover, does not aim to be a comprehensive history of the deaf, but rather an attempt to show how the presence of a (hearing) impairment could shape the lives of people in different ways and interact with the environment in which a person dwelt.<sup>91</sup> Although the sample of deaf individuals represents an important sample of the deaf in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century East Flanders (Chapter 2), extrapolations to other geographic areas should not be undertaken lightly. Comparable research into the lives of the deaf in other geographic areas is scarce. However, whenever possible comparisons with other regions are made to assess the generalizability of the experiences and processes described.

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<sup>88</sup> Barnartt, S. & Scotch, R. (2002) *Disability Protests: Contentious Politics 1970-1999*, XIX-XI.

<sup>89</sup> Sicard, R.-A. (1798) "Premier mémoire: Sur la nécessité d'instruire les sourds-muets de naissance, et sur les premiers moyens de communication avec ces infortunés" In: *Mémoires de l'Institut National des Sciences et Arts*. Paris: Baudouin, v.1. (See 3.4)

<sup>90</sup> In the nineteenth century, educationalists and philosophers debated which type of disability was the worst. Their writings suggest that the experiences of and attitudes towards different groups of disabled people cannot be equated (see 3.4).

<sup>91</sup> A good illustration of the situational nature of the interpretation of deafness can be found in Groce's (1986) study of deafness on Martha's Vineyard. Between the seventeenth and early twentieth centuries, a variety of factors combined to produce a high incidence of deafness which crossed all family and socio-economic lines within the Islander community. Groce shows that the deaf Islanders were not perceived as disabled, neither by themselves nor by the hearing Islanders. Groce, N. (1985) *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language: Hereditary Deafness on Martha's Vineyard*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.



## Structure of the volume

This research consists of two parts. The first part covers the theoretical, conceptual and empirical framework of the study, and consists of two chapters. The first chapter addresses the disability terminology, theory and historical literature relevant for a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. Chapter 2 discusses the delineation of the research population, the research methods and the research context of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century East Flanders.

The central topics are addressed in part two, with five thematic chapters. The chapters are structured chronologically, parallel to the life course: from childhood to death.

Part two starts with an examination of the childhood experiences of the deaf population (Chapter 3). I provide a description of the parental households of the deaf children as an indication of the circumstances in which the deaf children grew up. In addition, mainly based on qualitative sources, I discuss the attitudes and perceptions of nineteenth-century contemporaries towards the deaf. What characterized the prevailing practices and attitudes towards the deaf, and how may they have influenced the lives of people with a hearing impairment? Finally, I also explore the preconditions for the establishment of deaf schools from the late eighteenth century onwards, as well as the practical organisation of deaf schools in East Flanders.

Chapter 4 deals with the issues of labour and employment. The aim is to examine the extent to which the employment pattern of the deaf fitted in with labour characteristics of the hearing and to see how nineteenth-century industrialization processes influenced the employment opportunities of the deaf. This chapter challenges the widely held assumption that the nineteenth century constituted a definite and negative break with the previous century by arguing that the professional lives of the deaf were not necessarily better before industrialization. Besides an analysis of the employment characteristics of the deaf research population, this chapter also discusses the influence of the development of deaf schools on the career opportunities for the deaf as well as the incidence of poverty. By empirically analysing the relationship between disability and poverty this chapter aims to bring clarity to the widely held belief that disabled people were all beggars in the pre-industrial era.

In Chapter 5 the events of marriage and parenthood are studied. Previous research suggests that disabled individuals were faced with stronger institutional, economic and cultural *barriers* in successfully entering the marriage market. In this chapter I explore these barriers and shed light on the marriage pattern of the deaf. Questions that are dealt with are: did deaf people marry less and/or later than able-bodied persons? With whom did they marry and did their choice of partner reflect a weaker position on the

marriage market? A second section is devoted to the family life and parenthood of deaf brides and grooms.

Chapter 6 is made up of two sections. In the first section, I study the physical mobility of the research population by looking into their residential and migration histories. The reconstruction of the household formation and composition processes as well as the direction, distance, frequency and motivations of migration trajectories enable one to test the extent to which deaf men and women were able to live an independent life and the position disabled family members occupied within family households and kinship relations. This way, I aim to verify the popular belief that industrialization processes so eroded the capacity for informal care that families were forced to leave behind their disabled members in formal institutions. This idea has not been unchallenged and scholars have pointed to the continuing responsibility of relatives for care in the community.<sup>92</sup> In the second section of Chapter 6, the social networks of the deaf are scrutinized. Did the deaf have a less varied and smaller network and did it become more difficult for deaf men and women to maintain a social network in the course of the nineteenth century? Although this chapter is mainly based on a quantitative analysis of the witnesses within civil registration acts, attention will also be paid to the extent to which deaf people were able to participate in leisure activities and become involved in formalized organisations, based on more qualitative testimonies.

Chapter 7 turns to the analysis of the lives of deaf and hearing people 'at the end': in old age and at death. The focus is also on institutionalization. As the chapter will show, institutionalization and old age are easily connected – although the relationship between them was hardly exclusive. Which characteristics determined whether a person was institutionalized, in which institutions did the deaf end up in and to what extent were individuals able to shape their own lives once they were institutionalized? These are questions on which this chapter tries to find an answer. The final sections of Chapter 7 focus on aspects of old age and mortality. Previous research has shown that disabled people were faced with a higher risk to die prematurely in comparison to those non-disabled.<sup>93</sup> The study of mortality patterns, when unravelling a structural pattern of premature death, can provide suggestive evidence of poor living conditions, more difficult access to health care or a generally tougher life as a consequence of being disabled.

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<sup>92</sup> E.g. Borsay, A. (2005) *Disability and Social Policy*.

<sup>93</sup> Haage, H. & Vikström, L. (2013) *Estimating Death Differentials to Measure the Labelling Impact of Disability: A Case Study of Past Populations in Sweden*. Unpublished conference paper presented at the XXVII International Population Conference (IUSSP), Busan.



# 1

## Framework



# 1 Terminology, theory and history

This first chapter addresses the disability terminology, theory and historical literature relevant for a comprehensive understanding of the research topic and the development of a theoretical framework.

This dissertation is based on a number of weighty concepts that need to be clarified before diving into the different thematic chapters. The concepts of *impairment* and *disability* were addressed in the introduction. Section 1.1 elaborates on notions of inclusion and integration, exclusion and stigmatization, and vulnerability – concepts that take a prominent place in disability studies and within this research project.

Next, I examine the ways in which disability was conceptualized alongside different disability models. Section 1.2 mainly focuses on the social model of disability and in particular its historical version, historical materialism. The theory, as developed by historical materialists Vic Finkelstein and Mike Oliver, is expounded, evaluated and discussed in relation to the aims of this research project.

The continuous expansion of (historical) disability publications renders a literary overview neither comprehensive nor exhaustive. As more general overviews are available in other writings, in section 1.3 I introduce the most significant (i.e. widely cited) publications that approach disability from a historical perspective.

Finally, I present a status quaestionis of the publications with regard to the history of deaf people. Section 1.4 gives a thematic and chronological overview of relevant and noteworthy contributions to deaf history, and indicates how this project can contribute to ongoing debates.

## 1.1 A matter of concepts

Central to the design of this research is the assumption that the nineteenth-century transition from a pre-modern to an industrial society contributed to decreased integration and increasing exclusion and stigmatization of disabled persons. Defining the meaning and contextualizing these concepts is necessary for a comprehensible interpretation of the research results. In this section, not only do I wish to clarify the terminology used, but also elucidate how the structure of this dissertation is related to statements about integration, exclusion and vulnerability.

### 1.1.1 Less integrated and more excluded

Each society is characterized by its own ways of excluding certain categories of people. The interpretation of *exclusion* therefore differs in time – throughout the history of a society – and in space – between different groups within a society.<sup>1</sup> As a result, people with disabilities may have encountered different types and levels of exclusion depending on time and space.

Psychiatrist Jean-Francois Ravaud and historian Henri-Jacques Stiker, in their contribution to the *Handbook of Disability Studies*, developed a typology of exclusion practices that distinguishes between six types of exclusion.<sup>2</sup> Exclusion processes can result in:

1. Elimination, either directly by killing the person or indirectly through abandonment.
2. Abandonment, as in ceasing to be concerned about a person (without any direct intention to kill him or her).
3. Segregation, referring both to geographical exclusion, which implies physical separation from a community, and to a form of social treatment, which frequently takes place within a community. With regard to disabled persons, segregation often involves institutionalization as a means to isolate them from society.
4. Assistance, mainly in the form of charity. By introducing a relation between the persons helped and the helpers, a relationship of subordination and dependence is created.
5. Marginalization, referring to the process in which a person is excluded as a consequence of their refusal or incapacity to accept dominating rules and norms.

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<sup>1</sup> Ravaud, J.F. & Stiker, H.J. (2001) "Inclusion/Exclusion: An Analysis of Historical and Cultural Meanings" In: Seelman, K.D., Albrecht, G.L. & Bury, M. (eds.) *Handbook of Disability Studies*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 490.

<sup>2</sup> Ravaud, J.F. & Stiker, H.J. (2001) "Inclusion/Exclusion", 490-514.

6. Discrimination, or to single out a social group and restrict its rights. To discriminate is to treat equal individuals inequitably.

This typology is quite schematic and needs to be applied flexibly as there are numerous intermediary forms between each of these manifestations. Nonetheless, this scheme provides a useful tool for identifying differences in the reactions of societies to people perceived as anomalous, such as people with disabilities. The evaluation of the hypothesis that the living circumstances of the disabled deteriorated in the course of the nineteenth century will benefit from the scheme, especially the category exclusion by segregation.

Studying exclusion is inextricably linked to the study of *inclusion* as one cannot be understood without the other. For disabled persons to be excluded a majority of others must be included. This included majority may have different compositions across different situations and aspects of society, such as access to labour, social acceptance and legislation. Therefore, the distinction between groups of people that are excluded and included cannot be simplified into a distinction between disabled and non-disabled individuals, but is crossed by additional social categories such as gender and social class. This research project aims to determine what deaf persons are excluded from and what they are included in, how and to what extent they are left out or included at different times and in different social groupings. In practice, this implies looking at the intersection between disability and personal characteristics such as gender and social class on the one hand, and between disability and the social context such as the region and time frame in which a person lived, on the other.

*Inclusion* as a concept to assess involvement in society is rather new and mainly used in the context of contemporary debates on inclusive education, where it captured the field during the 1990s.<sup>3</sup> A more commonly used term in the field of disability history is *integration*.<sup>4</sup> Instead of concentrating exclusively on the ways in which deaf persons faced exclusion, a focus on their involvement and the extent of their integration into the different social spheres constitutes a more viable and, in my opinion, more constructive way of structuring this study. Integration was mainly conceptualized in research on migration. Disability studies, however, can benefit greatly from these integration theories.

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<sup>3</sup> Vislie, L. (2003) "From Integration to Inclusion: Focusing Global Trends and Changes in the Western European Societies" *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 18/1, 18.

<sup>4</sup> However, integration is not identical to inclusion. Inclusion is more often used with reference to education. For more on the difference between inclusion and integration (with a focus on education): Vislie, L. (2003) "From Integration to Inclusion", 19-20.



Integration is a broad and multifaceted notion. Although there are different classification schemes, there is general agreement on two main types of integration: structural and social-cultural integration, also referred to as formal and informal integration.<sup>5</sup> Structural integration can be described as the full participation in social institutions. One's access to education, employment and housing are some key benchmarks that determine the extent of structural integration. Social-cultural integration refers more to the *inside* of social life, to its underlying norms and values and the ways in which social relationships within society are developed. Integration within a religious community and participation in associations can be considered examples of informal integration.<sup>6</sup> The extent of structural integration is easiest to measure in the analysis of the degree of labour participation, access to marriage, the specificity of migration trajectories and the frequency of institutionalization of the deaf research population. The combination of civil and population records provides the information needed for these aspects of formal participation. Historical sources that shed light on aspects of informal integration are more rare. Most historical studies on social relations make use of qualitative sources such as diaries, letters and memoirs, in which the authors themselves reveal information on their social situation. As the creation and preservation of these ego-documents was usually a privilege of the upper classes, historical studies have focused almost exclusively on the higher echelons of society.<sup>7</sup> The same applies to gaining insight into the prevailing norms and attitudes of past societies towards certain groups within society. Several authors from the eighteenth and nineteenth century onwards have written about the 'fate' of the deaf.<sup>8</sup> The analysis of these writings can provide important insights into how deaf men and women were perceived. However, such analyses should be done with caution as they raise the question as to what extent the ideas expressed in these texts were shared by the wider society. By combining contemporary scientific literature, newspaper articles from the more popular press and other qualitative sources, I

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<sup>5</sup> Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling (1998) *Integratie in perspectief*. The Hague, 58-9.

<sup>6</sup> Vermeulen, H. (1997) *Immigrantenbeleid voor de multiculturele samenleving: integratie-, taal- en religiebeleid voor immigranten in vijf West-Europese landen*. Amsterdam: IMES, 4; Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (2005) *Jaarrapport integratie*. The Hague, 107; Overkamp, E. (2000) *Instellingen nemen de wijk: een analyse van het beleid inzake de deconcentratie van instellingen voor mensen met een verstandelijke handicap en zijn empirische effecten*. Assen: Van Gorcum, 44.

<sup>7</sup> Bras, H. (2011) "Intensification of Family Relations? Changes in the Choices of Marriage Witnesses in the Netherlands 1830-1950" *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis*, 8/4, 102-35.

<sup>8</sup> Peet, H.P. (1855) "Notions of the Deaf Before Instruction, Especially on Regard to Religious Subjects" *American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb*, 142/3, 20-44; L'abbé Montaigne, M. (1847) *Recherches sur les connaissances intellectuelles des sourds-muets, considérés par rapport à l'administration des sacrements*. Leuven: Fonteyn; Scott, R.W. (1870) *The Deaf and Dumb: Their Education and Social Position*. London: Bell and Daldy. (See 3.4 for more contemporary literature)

aspire to avoid this pitfall and shed some light on the informal participation of the deaf in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century social life.

### 1.1.2 Increase in stigmatization

The notion of people with disabilities as being inferior, dependent, and by implication, of little or no value to society, is termed *disablism*, in analogy with for example racism or sexism. The concept was coined to describe the socio-political processes that marginalise and oppress disabled people. A disablist perspective considers disability as a social stigma which hinders a person from leading a normal life.<sup>9</sup>

One of the first scholars to theorize disability as a stigma was sociologist Erving Goffman, whose analysis of stigma and interpretation of the social experience of disability has been very influential in the field of disability studies. In his 1963 study, Goffman stated that every society operates ways to divide people into different categories which are characterized by qualities that are considered to be 'normal' and 'natural'. These qualities can either refer to structural characteristics, such as a person's occupation, or to personal characteristics, such as being honest. A person failing to meet this dominant social identity is regarded as being inferior, as someone who is stained or *stigmatised*.<sup>10</sup> Goffman distinguishes three types of stigma: 1) physical impairments, 2) deviating beliefs and behaviour, and 3) basic stigmas related to race, nation and religion. All three types have one feature in common: an individual possesses a trait that differs from what is anticipated and deemed normal, which makes 'normal' people turn their back on them. This process of rejection results in different varieties of discrimination through which a stigmatized person's life chances are reduced.<sup>11</sup>

Psychologist Lerita M. Coleman Brown, in her exploration of the nature of stigma and the ways in which it operates, has built on Goffman's theory and claims that stigma often results in a special kind of downward mobility as people who are stigmatized lose their place in the social hierarchy. She points out the important difference, however, between a feeling of differentness and actual stigmatization. One can speak of stigmatization when social control is imposed, when the feeling of stigmatization leads to restrictions in physical and social mobility and a person is denied access to opportunities

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<sup>9</sup> Metzler, I. (2006) *Disability in Medieval Europe. Thinking About Physical Impairment During the High Middle Ages, c. 1100-1400*. London: Routledge, 22.

<sup>10</sup> Goffman, E. (1963) *Stigma: Some Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Harmondsworth: Penguin; Goffman, E. (1971) *Stigma. Gedachten over leven met een geschonden identiteit*. Deventer: Van Loghum Slaterus.

<sup>11</sup> Goffman, E. (1997) "Selections from Stigma" In: Davis, L.J. (ed.) *The Disability Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 132.

to develop his or her potential.<sup>12</sup> According to Coleman Brown, stigmatization is the result of three mutually reinforcing processes. First, it is the result of an *affective* process, in which a person's differentness is received with fear. Second, stigmatization can be considered a *cognitive* process, a process of treating stigmatized people as categorically different rather than individually different, and in which they are reduced to degrading stereotypes. And third, it is a *behavioural* process, in which people use stigma to justify exploitation and exclusion, and to uphold majority-minority power relationships.

Stigma, according to Goffman and Coleman Brown, represents a set of personal and social constructs, a set of social relations and relationships.<sup>13</sup> Because stigmas are a reflection of a certain culture and society, the view on what is considered deviant is subject to change. The three processes of stigmatization are always the result of a “*cultural, historical, political and economic climate, which is in turn linked to the norms and laws*”.<sup>14</sup> Changing political and economic climates are considered important for stigmatization and destigmatization processes. People can become stigmatized for violating certain norms, but also for being of little political or economic value.<sup>15</sup>

In the last two decades, Goffman's work and that of his followers has been challenged. The main critique of Goffman's theory of stigma has been directed at its interactionist perspective. For Goffman, an individual's personality is constituted by the social interaction between people, and the ways in which a person's personal attributes are perceived by others. He can therefore posit a *disabled personality* which is created in the stigmatizing encounters with others in society.<sup>16</sup> The reason why 'normal' people are unwilling to regard disabled persons as equals is explained by the fact that their stigmatization serves the interests of the non-disabled. According to psychologist Carol J. Gill, Goffman's theory is too simple in its description of the role of non-disabled people in the marginalization of people with disabilities, and equally in acknowledging the devalued status of disabled people.<sup>17</sup> “*We are left with the impression that 'shameful difference' and its consequences are an immutable fact of social life, for physically impaired people*”, to quote

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<sup>12</sup> Coleman, L.M. (1997) “Stigma. An Enigma Demystified” In: Davis, L.J. (ed.) *The Disability Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 157.

<sup>13</sup> Similar ideas can be found in the works of e.g. Davis, F. (1961) “Deviance Disavowal: The Management of Strained Interaction by the Visibly Handicapped” *Social Problems*, 9, 120–32; Scott, R.A. (1969) *The Making of Blind Men: A Study of Adult Socialization*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

<sup>14</sup> Coleman Brown, L.M. (2006) “Stigma. An Enigma Demystified”, 151.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*; Stafford, M. & Scott, R. (1986) “Stigma, Deviance and Social Control: Some Conceptual Issues” In: Ainlay, S., Becker, G. & Coleman, L.M. (eds.) *The Dilemma of Difference: A Multicultural View of Stigma*. New York: Plenum, 77–91; Birenbaum, A. & Sagarin, E. (1976) *Norms and Human Behavior*. New York: Praeger.

<sup>16</sup> Metzler, I. (2006) *Disability in Medieval Europe*, 23.

<sup>17</sup> Gill, C.J. (2001) “Divided Understandings: The Social Experience of Disability” In: Albrecht, G.L., Seelman, K.D. & Bury, M. (eds.) *Handbook of Disability Studies*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 351–72.

disability studies scholar Paul Abberley, one of the main critics of Goffman in the United Kingdom. Abberley rejects the assertion by Goffman, Coleman Brown and others that stigmas are in constant flux and therefore, any human difference could become stigmatised at some point in time or in a specific culture. According to Abberley, “*the only way, in the real world that it is at all 'easy' to become stigmatised is to fall into one or more of the pre-existing categories of stigmatisation.*”<sup>18</sup>

Although there has been a divergence of views on the questions of what stigma is and why it still exists, the critics of Goffman’s theory and its followers do not deny the presence of groups in society that are stigmatized and excluded because of their differences. Gill states that Goffman’s thesis that relations between disabled persons and non-disabled persons are “*marked by strain, misunderstanding, and disconnection*” is supported by many data sources.<sup>19</sup> Abberley describes how people with disabilities are considered ‘abnormal’, which in his opinion is the result of a society failing to meet the needs of disabled people.

Disability history literature has offered three explanations for why people with disabilities became more stigmatized in the course of the nineteenth century. On the one hand, especially in the United States, scholars point to the popularity of Darwin’s theory of evolution, which inspired Galton’s eugenics movement. On the other hand, blame is placed on industrialization, with its demand for interchangeable bodies in industrial production. A third explanation relates to the process of medicalization that coincided with industrialization processes, as a way to distinguish between those who were able to work and those who were considered unable to work. For those unable to work, such as disabled people, new laws and programmes to benefit and accommodate them were established. This development was accompanied by an increasing fear of malingerers pretending to be disabled to avoid work.<sup>20</sup> This would have resulted in increased stigmatization of people with disabilities. I will elaborate on these different processes in the different thematic chapters.

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<sup>18</sup> Abberley, P. (1991) “Disabled People – 3 Theories of Disability” *Occasional Papers in Sociology*, 10, 8-10.

<sup>19</sup> Gill, C.J. (2001) "Divided Understandings", 359.

<sup>20</sup> Brune, J.A. (2014) *Disability Stigma and American Political Culture* < <http://www.gallaudet.edu/Documents/Abstract%20for%20DSAPC%280%29.pdf>>, consulted on 08/01/2014.

### 1.1.3 Disability and vulnerability

Another way to think about disability is in terms of *vulnerability*. Vulnerability arises from the interaction between a person's resources and the challenges they face in life.<sup>21</sup> So, persons who lack the necessary resources, become more vulnerable – more likely “to experience the bad things that can happen to humans”.<sup>22</sup> These “bad things” can have many outcomes: vulnerability can express itself in a higher mortality risk, unequal opportunities on the labour and marriage market, the confrontation with negative stereotypes, social exclusion and solitude, etc.

Some people are (believed to be) more vulnerable than others. Bio-ethicist Jackie Leach Scully states that all societies can be divided into two distinct groups: people who are ‘normal’ and sufficiently invulnerable to live a fulfilling life and the vulnerable others.<sup>23</sup> As such, vulnerability inherently concerns issues of power – and the lack of power – and social inequality. People can be more vulnerable because of characteristics they acquired at birth, such as being born from poor parents. Or they may become vulnerable in the confrontation with a hostile social environment, such as orphans, elderly persons and especially in historical societies, single women.<sup>24</sup>

People with disabilities have been perceived among the most vulnerable in past and present societies.<sup>25</sup> According to Scully, people with disabilities are even more vulner-

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<sup>21</sup> Mechanic, D. & Tanner, J. (2007) “Vulnerable People, Groups, and Populations: Societal View” *Health Affairs*, 26/5, 1220.

<sup>22</sup> Scully, J.L. (2014) “Disability and Vulnerability: On Bodies, Dependence, and Power” In: Mackenzie, C., Rogers, W. & Dodds, S. (eds.) *Vulnerability: New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 205.

<sup>23</sup> Scully, J.L. (2014) “Disability and Vulnerability”, 206.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. Schumacher, R., Ryczkowska, G. & Perroux, O. (2007) “Unwed Mothers in the City. Illegitimate Fertility in 19th-Century Geneva” *The History of the Family*, 12, 189-202; De Langhe, S. & Mechant, M. (2009) *Vulnerable Women?: Unmarried Women in the Southern Netherlands During the Eighteenth and First Half of the Nineteenth Century*. Unpublished conference paper presented at the 4th Flemish-Dutch Conference. A nice collection of historical papers addressing vulnerability from the different perspectives of age, gender and social class, can be found in: Bourdelais, P. & Chircop, J. (eds.) (2010) *Vulnerability, Social Inequality and Health*. Lisbon: Edições Colibri.

<sup>25</sup> David Turner described people with disabilities in eighteenth-century England as “vulnerable but also deserving of assistance” (Turner, D.M. (2012) *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England: Imagining Physical Impairment*. New York: Routledge, 33). Similarly, in her disability history of the United States, Kim E. Nielsen stated that “just as people with cognitive disabilities today are vulnerable to physical and sexual assault or economic exploitation, so were colonial idiots” (Nielsen, K.E. (2012) *A Disability History of the United States*. Boston: Beacon Press, 27). Also John V. Van Cleve argued how “life for deaf urban dwellers [in nineteenth-century Toronto] must have been vulnerable and precarious” (Van Cleve, J.V. (1993) *Deaf History Unveiled: Interpretations from the New Scholarship*. Washington: Gallaudet university press, 139).

able than non-disabled persons because of three specific types of vulnerabilities: inherent, contingent and ascribed global vulnerabilities.<sup>26</sup>

With *inherent* vulnerabilities, she refers to difficulties that arise directly from the impairment itself. For example, some impairments cause people to be more vulnerable to disease, infections or a reduced life span. Similarly, blind people are more vulnerable to bump into things; people with a mobility impairment might fall more easily. The inherent nature of these vulnerabilities makes them more difficult to resolve. *Contingent* vulnerabilities, on the other hand, are difficulties that arise from social and environmental factors. The maladjustment of society to the special needs of disabled people explains why disabled persons are, for example, more likely to be impoverished, unemployed, uneducated or have less access to health care. Contingent vulnerabilities are “*neither natural nor inevitable consequences of the impairment*”, but result from the ways social relations and institutions are organized and generate specific social, cultural and political responses to disability. This social evaluation of vulnerability fits in perfectly with the views of the new disability historians and the social interpretation of disability. Finally, Scully distinguishes *ascribed global* vulnerabilities. By this, she means that many non-disabled people tend to ascribe a disabled person’s vulnerability in one area to a global vulnerability in all aspects of that person’s life. In other words, because a disabled person experiences difficulties in one aspect of his life course, they are believed to be generally vulnerable – in the sense they are always weak and helpless. The decision of some historical societies to deny deaf people political and legal rights is an illustration of this ascribed global vulnerability.

Based on the theory designed by Scully, deaf people can be perceived to be vulnerable because of the direct and indirect difficulties they experience as being deaf, as well as from the general misbeliefs in the capabilities of deaf people. Throughout the different chapters in this study, I examine the different ways in which deaf people were more vulnerable to deviate from more common life trajectories, as well as the reasons for their increased vulnerability. For example, were deaf men and women more vulnerable to remain permanently single? And was this vulnerability the result of their inherent communication difficulties, their contingent difficulties to accumulate money as preparation for starting one’s own household or the result of the globally ascribed belief that deaf persons were inadequate to start a family?

Recently, life course analysis has been legitimated as a productive framework to understand the processes that lead to vulnerability and the ways individuals cope with it.<sup>27</sup> In

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<sup>26</sup> Scully, J.L. (2014) “Disability and Vulnerability”, 206-10.

other words, life course analysis enables to “analyze processes of vulnerability across the life course, with a focus on individual life trajectories embedded in their wider and dynamic social contexts”.<sup>28</sup> Depending on a deaf person’s circumstances, the dominant societal characteristics and beliefs, and the situation (marriage, employment, social networks, migration, and so forth), deaf persons may have experienced different levels and types of vulnerabilities. The life course analysis, central in this study, allows to study vulnerability from this differentiated perspective.

## 1.2 Theorizing about disability

Disability studies has only emerged as an academic discipline in the last three decades, the outcome of a political disability movement that took hold in the United States and Europe in the 1960s and 1970s. Although the disability movement is a worldwide phenomenon, disability studies witnessed the fastest development in Britain and the United States, which explains the strong representation of British and American authors in this section on disability theory and history. Discussing the emergence and development of disability studies extends beyond the scope and objectives of this research.<sup>29</sup> However, even a study that aims to focus on personal experiences of disablement needs to be placed within a theoretical framework. In this section, I provide a concise sketch of the ways in which disability scholars have conceptualized disability. More specifically, I discuss the social model of disability and its influential derivative, historical materialism, which lies at the foundations of this study.

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<sup>27</sup> E.g. Oris, M., Ritschard, G. & Ryczkowska, G. (2004) *Solitude and Vulnerability in Female Life Courses, Geneva, 1816-1843*. Conference paper presented at the Social Science History Association Annual Meeting; Devos, I., Matthijs, K. & Van de Putte, B. (eds.) (2014) *Vulnerability. Kwetsbare groepen en historische demografie*. Leuven: Acco.

<sup>28</sup> Spini, D. et al. (2013) “Vulnerability across the Life Course: A Theoretical Framework and Research Directions” *Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research*, 12.

<sup>29</sup> As a starting point for an in-depth reading of the field of disability studies, I refer to: Seelman, K.D., Albrecht, G.L. & Bury, M. (2001) *Handbook of Disability Studies*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications; Albrecht, G.L., Ravaud, J.-F. & Stiker, H.-J. (2001) “L'émergence des disability studies: état des lieux et perspectives” *Sciences Sociales et Santé*, 19/4, 43-73.

### 1.2.1 A social model of disability

Disability studies and history have long been characterized by an absence of theoretical frameworks.<sup>30</sup> Gleeson ascribes this atheoretical character to the fact that many of the disability contributors are either practitioners or advocates, with both groups having an eye on the immediate policy landscape. However, more recently there have been serious contributions to the social theorization of disability, often by disabled academics.<sup>31</sup> From the 1970s onwards and especially in the 1980s, disability became a point of interest for a wide range of scholars who theorized disability from equally wide-ranging angles. Disability was studied from a historical-geographical and materialist perspective, from an anthropological or comparative cultural standpoint, and from psychological and sociological points of view.<sup>32</sup>

What most of these studies have in common is the belief that disability is a socio-political construction. In other words, disability emerges when people with an impairment confront an inhospitable physical environment combined with negative social attitudes, which results in their systematic oppression, exclusion and discrimination.<sup>33</sup> Scholars advocating this social approach to disability reject the medical view on disability that originated in the nineteenth century and remained dominant until the second half of the twentieth century. The medical model of disability considers impairment as a problem that belongs to the disabled individual. It promotes the view of a disabled person as dependent and in need of cure or care. Historically, therefore, if disabled individuals were not cared for by charitable institutions and medical professionals they were assumed to have been left to their fate. The medical model of disability is by nature a *top-down* approach, mainly based on evidence from professionals and institutions,

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<sup>30</sup> Davis, L.J. (1995) *Enforcing Normalcy. Disability, Deafness, and the Body*. London: Verso, 1-22.

<sup>31</sup> E.g. Abberley, P. (1991) "Disabled People – 3 Theories of Disability" *Occasional Papers in Sociology*, 10; Abberley, P. (1993) "Disabled People and 'Normality'" In: Swain, J., Finkelstein, V., French, S. & Oliver, M. (eds.) *Disabling Barriers – Enabling Environments*. London: Sage, 107-15; Hahn, H. (1989) "Disability and the Reproduction of Bodily Images: the Dynamics of Human Appearances" In: Wolch, J. & Dear, M. (eds.) *The Power of Geography: How Territory Shapes Social Life*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 370-88; Oliver, M. (1990) *The Politics of Disablement*; Shakespeare, T. (1994) "Cultural Representation of Disabled People: Dustbins for Disavowal" *Disability & Society*, 9, 283-99; Zola, K. (1993) "Self, Identity and the Naming Question: Reflections on the Language of Disability" *Social Science and Medicine*, 36/2, 167-73.

<sup>32</sup> For an overview of the different approaches to disability, see: Barnes, C., Mercer, G. & Shakespeare, T. (1999) *Exploring Disability. A Sociological Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press. (Chapter 3 is particularly interesting.)

<sup>33</sup> Lang, R. (2007) *The Development and Critique of the Social Model of Disability*. Working paper, 2 <[http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lc-ccr/centrepublishations/workingpapers/WP03\\_Development\\_Critique.pdf](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lc-ccr/centrepublishations/workingpapers/WP03_Development_Critique.pdf)>, consulted on 10/01/2014.



and a *personal tragedy* approach, which turns disabled individuals into dependent victims, acted upon rather than active.<sup>34</sup>

During the 1970s and 1980s, critics voiced objections to this medical approach, resulting in the emergence of two types of social models. In the United States, the reconceptualization of disability resulted in the development of a minority model, which mainly concentrates on aspects of discourse and meaning – the publications of Rosemarie Garland Thomson can be considered an example of this approach. In Britain, on the other hand, scholars are more concerned with “*material factors, social relations and political power*”, in what is known as the social model of disability.<sup>35</sup> In the remainder of this chapter, I will focus on the British social model, as this was of most influence in European disability research.

Scholars and activists advocating a social model of disability argue that disability stems from the relationship between individuals and their environment and larger society.<sup>36</sup> More specifically, they postulate that disabled people live in a social environment that is not adjusted to their needs – in contrast to the medical model, which considers this maladjustment to be the result of the biological inability of a disabled individual to adapt to the demands of society.<sup>37</sup> The social model therefore concentrates on causes of disablement that are located externally, that is on the obstacles imposed on disabled people which reduce their opportunities to fully participate in society.<sup>38</sup> Within the social model, different approaches ascribe importance and meaning to a multitude of obstacles that result in the oppression of people with disabilities. Given the scope of this research, it would be impractical to provide a comprehensive description of the wide variety of social models of disability. So I only discuss the four models which Gleeson considers to be the most obvious frameworks, based on his *Geographies of Disability*.

The first type of social model he discusses is the *structuralist* view, which conceptualizes disability from the level of macro-social phenomena such as the economy, policy, and cultural and institutional practices. Gleeson’s main critique of this theory relates to its dehumanizing portrait of people as simple products of social forces. A second social model is referred to as *humanism* and is mainly concerned with the humanization of

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<sup>34</sup> Barnes, C., Mercer, G. & Shakespeare, T. (1999) *Exploring Disability. A Sociological Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 21-7; Anderson, J. (2007) “Enabling the Past: New Perspectives in the History of Disability” *European Review of History*, 14/4, 447.

<sup>35</sup> Shakespeare, T. (ed.)(1998) *The Disability Reader. Social Science Perspectives*. London/New York: Cassell, 2.

<sup>36</sup> Kristiansen, K. & Traustadottir, R. (2008) *Gender and Disability Research in the Nordic Countries*. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 31-5.

<sup>37</sup> Hahn, H. (1986) “Public Support for Rehabilitation in Programs: The Analysis of US Disability Policy” *Disability, Handicap & Society*, 1/2, 121-38.

<sup>38</sup> Barnes, C., Mercer, G. & Shakespeare, T. (1999) *Exploring Disability*, 30.

terminology, as for example the use of *people with disabilities* instead of *disabled people*. A third social model, *idealism*, emphasizes the non-material dynamics (e.g. attitudes, aesthetics) that characterize the experience of impairment. In this model, disability is viewed as an ideological construct rooted in the negative attitudes of society. The previously discussed theory of stigma by Goffman is a well-known example. Finally, Gleeson discusses the model of *normalization* as described by Wolf Wolfensberger and Susan Thomas among others.<sup>39</sup> Normalization is defined here as the set of “*culturally valued social roles*”. People with an impairment are not considered ‘normal’ because they do not comply with the established norms of society.<sup>40</sup>

Despite their differences, these variants of the social model have two features in common, according to Gleeson. They all share the belief that disability is a product of specific environments, a phenomenon that is socially relational as opposed to biologically determined. And all disregard the importance of history. In a historical study of disability therefore, these models are of limited use. However, disability studies have not entirely erased history and Gleeson distinguishes two ways in which history is integrated within disability studies: in the form of microscopic histories and in the adoption of a historical materialist perspective. The former refers to a few brief, vague and not very empirically grounded paragraphs on the history of disability, and will be discussed briefly in section 1.3. The historical materialist approach of disability was developed in a response to the failings of the social models as detailed above. It is this type of historical approach to disability that provides the foundations for this study.

### 1.2.2 Historical materialism as a social, historical theory of disability

The historical materialist approach to disability was primarily theorized by a small but influential group of disability activists, many of whom were disabled themselves. Vic Finkelstein and Michael Oliver, who both drew on structuralist and Marxist perspectives, were the first to argue that disability in its present sense was an outcome of the nineteenth-century development of Western industrial society.

Disability activist and writer Vic Finkelstein divided history into three sequential phases. The first phase broadly corresponds to the Early Modern Period prior to industrialization, when economic activity consisted primarily of agrarian or cottage-based industries – a mode of production which does not exclude people with impairments. An

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<sup>39</sup> E.g. Flynn, R.J. & Lemay, R.A. (eds.) (1999) *A Quarter-Century of Normalization and Social Role Valorization: Evolution and Impact*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press.

<sup>40</sup> Based on Gleeson, B. (1999) “Social Science and Disability” In: Gleeson, B. *Geographies of Disability*. London: Routledge, 19-23.

impairment was seen as a personal misfortune, but did not lead to separation from the rest of society. As Finkelstein notes, the physically disabled lived in harsh conditions in the feudal period, but in a context where life was harsh for the majority of people, their circumstances were not significantly worse.<sup>41</sup> According to historian Jacques Le Goff, physical disabilities were omnipresent in the Early Modern Period as a result of the frequent occurrence of tuberculosis, which caused many deformities, and the popular worship of a number of saints who were associated with impairments also testifies to the presence of physical disabilities.<sup>42</sup> Gleeson even states that the obviousness of physical disabilities in early modern society was in part responsible for the relative *invisibility* of disability in sources. According to Gleeson, the integration of people with a physical defect was primarily motivated by economic necessity, rather than charity. Peasant households could not afford unproductive family members, which implied that suitable types of work had to be found for all family members.<sup>43</sup> In Finkelstein's phase two, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when industrialization took hold, disabled people were excluded on the grounds that they were unable to keep pace with the new factory-based work system. Unemployed workers mingled with unemployable disabled people in the growing towns. Apprehensive of the rising population mobility and the civil discontent among the unemployed, civil authorities began to build segregated institutions for disabled people as well as others without a home or source of income. A further distinction was then made between those who were able but did not work and those who were physically impaired. The latter were seen as rightful recipients of charity, unlike the vagabonds who got what they deserved. Thus the final segregative process occurred, which set disabled people apart from all others. Whereas physically impaired people in a predominantly agrarian society were seen as socially active and responsible for their actions, phase two was characterized by a perception of physically impaired people as passive, as disabled. Finally, in phase three, which according to Finkelstein began in the 1980s, disabled people will be liberated from oppression through technology, and the working together of people with impairments and their helpers towards commonly held goals.<sup>44</sup>

Building on Finkelstein's account of the link between capitalism and the development of disability, Michael Oliver produced the first comprehensive materialist theory of disability. In *The Politics of Disablement* (1990), Oliver argues that the society in which a dis-

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<sup>41</sup> Finkelstein, V. (1981) "Disability and the Helper/Helped Relationship. An Historical View" In: Liddiard, P., Brechin, A. & Swain, J. (eds.) *Handicap in a Social World*. Hodder and Stoughton, 12-22.

<sup>42</sup> Le Goff, J. (1984) *La civilisation de l'Occident médiéval*. Paris: Arthaud, 271-4.

<sup>43</sup> Gleeson, B. (1997) "Disability Studies: A Historical Materialist View" *Disability and society*, 12/2, 86 & 95.

<sup>44</sup> Finkelstein, V. (1981) "Disability and the Helper/Helped Relationship", 12-22.

abled person lives has a profound effect on how their disability is experienced and structured. According to Oliver, two aspects of a society determine the social structuring of disability: the mode of production and the dominant ideology. Both interact and determine how disabled people are perceived. The *mode of production* refers to the way the economy is structured and to its productive units, as well as to how labour is organized. For example, labour can be organized through a network of family units or in a more formal system of wage labour. *Ideology* refers to the core values of a society, as they are contained in religion, science and medicine. As ideological premises can differ between societies and generations, impairment is not negatively perceived in all societies. Thus, “*The nature of disability can only be understood by using a model which takes account of both changes in the mode of production and the mode of thought, and the relationship between them*”.<sup>45</sup>

Based on this framework, Oliver argues that the economic structure and ideological hegemony of modern Western society has had a devastating impact on the lives of marginalized groups, such as the disabled. In the nineteenth century, the mode of production evolved from a home-based family economy to a system of factory-based wage labour. Individuals unable to meet the demands of the new capitalist society were forced out the labour market. Oliver believes that this development of capitalism was accompanied by a change in the mode of thought. He suggests that the process of individualizing labour was paralleled by the development of an individualization of employment or an ideology of the individual. As the rise of capitalism necessitated the separation of work from home, individuals experienced a detachment from their families and group structures, which had previously characterized society. To sustain this radical uprooting process, the middle class developed a social policy, nowadays called *discipline*. This resulted in a social policy that made a distinction between those considered able-bodied (and by implication able to work) and those who were disabled.<sup>46</sup> To determine whether or not someone was able to work, appeal was made to the emerging medical science. In Belgium, this *medicalization* process saw major development around the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>47</sup> While up to the end of the eighteenth century medicine had focused primarily on health, nineteenth-century medicine was more concerned with normality. A patient’s health was judged not only in terms of their physical normality but also in terms of the effective functioning of the five senses. To have a problem with one of the senses was to become less sensible, less than normal and, thus, incapable of

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<sup>45</sup> Oliver, M. (1990) *The Politics of Disablement: A Sociological Approach*, 32; Lang, R. (2001) *The Development and Critique*, 10-1.

<sup>46</sup> Oliver, M. (1990) *The Politics of Disablement*.

<sup>47</sup> Velle, K. (1986) “Medikalisering in België in historisch perspectief: een inleiding” *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Filologie en Geschiedenis*, 64, 256-85.

sensibility or rationality. Patients who could not meet the arbitrary normative standards must therefore, according to the medical experts, have their lives controlled for them by others. Disabled people became further isolated from their family communities through the establishment of closed and segregated institutions, which were first established in the late nineteenth century. In the nineteenth century, people with a disability became the object of new and more comprehensive control measures.<sup>48</sup> A final tenet of Oliver's analysis is the importance of *dependency*. According to Oliver, the socio-economic structure and ideological framework of modern society resulted in the perception of disabled people as dependent. On the one hand, they became *physically* dependent as they had to rely on services such as education and financial aid, which were state organized. On the other hand, they were increasingly *perceived* to be dependent as they were considered unable to take care of themselves.

This historical materialist model was received with much enthusiasm and several scholars became fellow travellers of materialism.<sup>49</sup> Colin Barnes, Simi Linton and Brendon Gleeson are among the scholars who posit that the transition from feudalism to capitalism contributed to the exclusion of disabled people from society.<sup>50</sup> Deborah Stone, Harlan Hahn and Paul Abberley have also theorized about disability from a materialist perspective.

Political scientist Deborah Stone further developed Finkelstein's thesis in *The Disabled State* (1986), in which she specified a distributive dilemma as central to the formulation of disability: "All societies have at least two distributive systems, one based on work and one on need". The mission was "to reconcile them without undermining the productive side of the economy". Stone focused on the role of the state in (re)defining the boundaries of dependency by setting up categories which expressed "a culturally legitimate rationale for non-participation in the labour system". But because disability was diverse, unstable and prone to abuse by impostors who feigned illness or impairment to obtain assistance, nineteenth-century medical professionals were called upon to assess disability, as their scientific status climbed. Stone's theory was criticized for her assumption that the dis-

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<sup>48</sup> Branson, J. & Miller, D. (2002) *Damned for Their Difference: The Cultural Construction of Deaf People as Disabled: A Sociological History*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 39-40.

<sup>49</sup> To only name a few: Stone, D.A. (1984) *The Disabled State*. Houndmills: Macmillan; Wolfensberger, W. (1989) "Human Services Policies: The Rhetoric Versus The Reality" In: Barton, L. (ed.) *Disability and Dependence*. Lewes: Famer, 23-42; Albrecht, G.L. (1992) *The Disability Business. Rehabilitation in America*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications. For these writers 'disability' as a social problem is the inevitable outcome of the evolution of industrial society.

<sup>50</sup> Barnes, C. (1996) "Theories of Disability and the Origins of the Oppression of Disabled People in Western Society" In: Barton, L. (ed.) *Disability & Society: Emerging Issues and Insights*. London: Longman, 43-60; Linton, S. (1998) *Claiming Disability. Knowledge and Identity*. New York: New York University Press; Gleeson, B. (1999) *Geographies of Disability*. London: Routledge.

tributive dilemma was universal and for her fixation with official categories of people (un)willing to work and people needing support, which led to too much attention paid to the role of the state in the experience of disablement.<sup>51</sup>

According to political scientist Harlan Hahn, researchers need to look no further than the nineteenth- and twentieth-century trends of capitalism to find the explanation for contemporary prejudice and discrimination against the disabled. Hahn argues that in a predominantly agrarian society, the family was the most important economic unit and within this unit, people with disabilities were likely to find a way in which they could contribute to the survival of the family. Like Oliver, Harlan believes that the coincidence of home and work screened disabled individuals from exposure to the inequities characterizing modern impersonal and autonomous societies. The nineteenth-century change in the organization of production went together with the development of a consumer economy in which an image of what was appropriate or acceptable was propagated and an overwhelming stress was put on beauty. Mass communication therefore played a prominent role “*in moulding an environment in which consumers were encouraged [...] to strive relentlessly to satisfy unachievable standards of personal appearance.*”<sup>52</sup>

In *The Concept of Oppression and the Development of a Social Theory of Disability*, Paul Abberley advocates using the term *oppression* in the analysis of disability. According to Abberley, disabled people can be regarded as a group “*whose members are in an inferior position to other members of society because they are disabled people*”. This inferior position is ascribed to the presence of an ideology that justifies the superiority of some over others. Abberley’s theory of disability as oppression advocates recognizing that people with disabilities face social, economic and psychological disadvantages as a result of certain ideologies. He states that these disadvantages can be considered as historical products, namely manifested through the material and ideological dimensions of patriarchy, racism and capitalism.<sup>53</sup>

These materialist accounts share the belief that disabled people’s oppression is based on the material and ideological changes that accompanied the emergence of an industrial capitalist society. We can point to three distinct characteristics that unite these theories, as explained below.

The first main tenet of the materialist approach is the clear distinction that is made between *impairment* and *disability*. Disability is considered anything but a natural human

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<sup>51</sup> Stone, D.A. (1984) *The Disabled State*, 15-20; Borsary, A. (2005) *Disability and Social Policy in Britain since 1750*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 12.

<sup>52</sup> Hahn, H. (1987) “Advertising the Acceptably Employable Image: Disability and Capitalism” *Policy Studies Journal*, 15/3, 181.

<sup>53</sup> Abberley, P. (1987) “The Concept of Oppression and the Development of a Social Theory of Disability” *Disability, Handicap & Society*, 2/1, 7.

experience, but what “*may become of impairment as each society produces itself socio-spatially.*” Materialist accounts, therefore, presume a priori that there is no necessary correspondence between impairment and disability. While impairment is considered to have been an everyday characteristic of early modern societies, disablement is not. Impairment is simply referred to as a bodily state that affects the physicality of people and “*can only be understood – historically and culturally – through its socialization as disability or some other (less repressive) social identity.*”<sup>54</sup>

The second feature, based on the distinction between impairment and disability, is that disability is defined as *social oppression*. In his comment on the crucial distinction between disability and impairment, disability activist Paul Hunt wrote: “*Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society.*”<sup>55</sup>

Thirdly, the social construction of impaired people as disabled is considered to result primarily from the ways in which a society structures its basic activities such as work, leisure, domestic activities and so forth. Disability is therefore not a fixed, absolute category but has been defined differently in different societies, depending on their social structures. Consequently, to understand the contemporary situation of people with disabilities, one needs to analyse disability from a historical perspective. The focus on social structures does not imply that attitudes, discourses and symbolic representations are ignored in the construction of disability. However, these cultural factors themselves are considered to be “*the product of the social practices which society undertakes in order to meet its basic material needs.*”<sup>56</sup>

The contribution of historical materialist theoreticians to the development of the social model of disability, and more generally to the field of disability studies and disability policy is generally acknowledged. By placing the focus on the disabling potential of society, a shift was created in the manner in which disability was perceived and disability as a social issue appeared on the political agenda. However, the model has raised some objections both from within the field of disability studies and from a historical perspective.

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<sup>54</sup> Gleeson, B. (1997) “Disability Studies: A Historical Materialist View”, 194.

<sup>55</sup> Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (1976) *Fundamental Principles of Disability* <<http://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/files/library/UPIAS-fundamental-principles.pdf>>, consulted on 12/01/2014), 3.

<sup>56</sup> Gleeson, B. (1997) “Disability Studies: A Historical Materialist View”, 194.

### 1.2.2.1 Criticism from within

Recently a new generation of disability scholars has emerged, who have set up a critical debate about the social model as conceptualized by Oliver and others. In this regard, Sebastian Barsch, Anne Klein and Pieter Verstraete aptly remarked in *The Imperfect Historian. Disability Histories in Europe* (2013): “the disability historian’s toolbox does not have to be interpreted on the basis of the social model alone”.<sup>57</sup> Scholars writing from a postmodern or feminist approach, in particular, have raised objections to the ways in which disability has been conceptualized. Colin Barnes and Geoff Mercer recently published three volumes discussing the complexities and implications of deploying a social model approach.<sup>58</sup> Other disability scholars too have indicated the limitations of the materialist framework.<sup>59</sup> We can roughly group their critiques into two main issues that are of central importance to the debate.

The first major criticism of the social model concerns its disconnection between impairment and disability. Critics have stated that, in making a distinction between a biological impairment and a social disability, the social model ignores the importance of the impairment itself, both in everyday experiences and in disability theory.<sup>60</sup> The assertion that “impairment is in fact nothing less than a description of the physical body”<sup>61</sup> has been questioned on the grounds that the impact of a person’s daily experiences of living with an impairment on their experiences of disablement cannot be overestimated. Policy analyst Jenny Morris, disabled herself, agrees that environmental barriers and social attitudes are crucial in the experience of disability, but appointing these as the only sources of disablement is to deny the personal experiences of physical or intellectual limitations, of illness and the fear of dying.<sup>62</sup> Both feminist disability theorists Liz Crow and Sally French argue that the social model of disability needs to recognize that impairment is part of the experience of disability, and claim that, even when social barriers are removed, some impairments will continue to exclude disabled individuals from

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<sup>57</sup> Barsch, S., Klein, A. & Verstraete, P. (2013) “The Need for Imperfection: Disability Histories in Europe” In: Barsch, S., Klein, A. & Verstraete, P. (eds.) *The Imperfect Historian. Disability Histories in Europe*. Bern: Peter Lang, 8.

<sup>58</sup> Barnes, C. & Mercer, G. (eds.) (2004) *Implementing the Social Model of Disability: Theory and Research*. Leeds: The Disability Press; Barnes, C. & Mercer, G. (eds.) (2004) *Disability Policy: Applying the Social Model*. Leeds: The Disability Press; Barnes, C. & Mercer, G. (eds.) (2004) *The Social Model of Disability: Europe and the Majority World*. Leeds: The Disability Press.

<sup>59</sup> E.g. Kristiansen, K. & Traustadottir, R. (2008) *Gender and Disability Research in the Nordic Countries*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

<sup>60</sup> For example: Morris, J. (1996) *Encounters With Strangers: Feminism and Disability*. London: Women’s Press Ltd.

<sup>61</sup> Oliver, M. (1995) *Understanding Disability. From Theory to Practice*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 4-5.

<sup>62</sup> Morris, J. (1991) *Pride Against Prejudice: Transforming Attitudes to Disability*. Philadelphia: New Society.



specific activities. Historical materialist theoreticians have countered this critique by arguing that “*bringing impairment in*” obscures the most important targets for political action and clouds the theory’s main objective, which is to challenge the structure and processes within contemporary society that oppress them. According to Oliver, disability theory should not be seen as an attempt to deal with the personal restrictions of impairment, but rather the environmental and social barriers that constitute disability.<sup>63</sup>

The second cluster of criticism relates to the emphasis the social model places on socio-structural barriers, and how it ignores the cultural and experiential dimensions of disability. Disability scholar Bill Armer questions the emphasis historical materialism puts on economic structures as the foundation for social oppression. In a historical materialist story, according to Armer, the underlying theme is that people with impairments are expensive and inefficient workers and are thus discarded from the workforce and deprived of full socio-economic inclusion. However, he believes that market economic factors alone cannot fully explain the socio-economic exclusion of people with an impairment. To strengthen his statement, he quotes Henry Ford who stated in 1923 that “*charity becomes unnecessary as those who seem to be unable to earn livings are taken out of the non-productive class and put into the productive...*”<sup>64</sup> In other words, the belief in the inability of disabled people to work might not have been as widespread as is assumed. Moreover, from an economic point of view, the historical materialist model does not explain why people with disabilities that do not prevent them from working are considered socio-economically disadvantaged. Armer suggests using the discourse of *normality* to explain why people with, for example, sensory impairments or learning difficulties were also considered deviant.

Social scientist Donna Reeve deplores how the focus has been on public experiences of oppression, at the expense of more personal experiences which operate at the emotional level.<sup>65</sup> Disabled writer Tom Shakespeare too pleads for a modification of the social model to account for personal experiences of impairment. He claims this can be achieved by a deeper analysis of the role of culture in the oppression of disabled people. Shakespeare considers prejudice to be as equally important as material factors in the discrimination of people with disabilities. As prejudice is implicitly expressed in cultural

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<sup>63</sup> Crow, L. (1996) “Including All of Our Lives: Renewing the Social Model of Disability” In: Barnes, C. & Mercer, G. *Exploring the Divide*. Leeds: The Disability Press, 55-72; Corker, M. & French, S. (1999) *Disability Discourse: Disability, Human Rights and Society*. Philadelphia: Open University Press; Barnes, C. & Mercer, G. (2010) *Exploring Disability*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 96.

<sup>64</sup> Armer, B. (2004) “In Search of a Social Model of Disability; Marxism, Normality and Culture” In: Barnes, C. & Mercer, G. (eds.) *Implementing the Social Model of Disability: Theory and Research*. Leeds: The Disability Press, 48-64.

<sup>65</sup> Reeve, D. (2004) “Psycho-Emotional Dimensions of Disability and the Social Model” In: Barnes, C. & Mercer, G. *Implementing the Social Model of Disability: Theory and Research*. Leeds: The Disability Press, 83-100.

representations, language and socialization, one should turn to the analysis of these cultural expressions.<sup>66</sup> Irena Metzler concurs with Shakespeare's plea for a cultural approach. According to her, materialist interpretations of disability do not provide a full explanation as they are too unsophisticated in their assumption of simple relationships between the mode of production on the one hand and experiences of disability on the other. The impact of ideology or culture is, writes Metzler, just as great as, if not greater than, the materialist situation.<sup>67</sup>

As part of this move towards a cultural and experiential approach, feminist and post-modernist scholars have increasingly focused on the different dimensions of disability, which the materialist framework does not take into account. In her analysis, sociologist Carol Thomas not only points to the importance of general cultural characteristics for the creation of disability, but also to the specific differences within a culture alongside categories such as gender, ethnicity, sexuality and type of impairment.<sup>68</sup> Thomas's claim was widely supported by several scholars, who criticized the social model for its lack of distinction between different types of disability and its inattention to people with certain kinds of impairments, such as intellectual disabilities and deafness.<sup>69</sup> Experiences of exclusion by deaf people for example are less likely to be created by economic structures says Thomas, but more related to language, communication and cultural systems.<sup>70</sup> In the words of disability policy scholar Raymond Lang: "*To what extent can disabled people be considered as a monolithic, homogeneous entity, and to what extent is the understanding of disablement contingent upon social and cultural factors? In other words, is it possible to construct a 'grand theory' that is valid for all impairment groups, across all cultural settings?*"<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Shakespeare, T. (1997) "Cultural Representations of Disabled People: Dustbins for Disavowal" In: Oliver, M. & Barton, L. (eds.) *Disability Studies: Past, Present and Future*. Leeds: The Disability Press, 217-33.

<sup>67</sup> Metzler, I. (2006) *Disability in Medieval Europe*, 25.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas, C. (2002) "Disability Theory: Key Ideas, Issues and Thinkers" In: Barnes, C., Oliver, M. & Barton, L. (eds.) *Disability Studies Today*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 38-57. Disability and gender: e.g. Morris, J. (1991) *Pride Against Prejudice*; Fine, M. & Asch, A. (1988) *Women with Disabilities*. Philadelphia: Rutgers University Press; Shuttleworth, R. P. (2004) "Disabled Masculinity: Expanding the Masculine Repertoire" In: Smith, B.G. & Hutchison, B. (eds.) *Gendering Disability*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 166-78. Disability and ethnicity: e.g. Stuart, O. (1993) "Double Oppression: An Appropriate Starting Point?" In: Swain, J., Finkelstein, V., French, S. & Oliver, M. (eds.) *Disabling Barriers-Enabling Environments*. London: Open University, 101-6. Disability and sexuality: e.g. Shakespeare, T., Gillespie-Sells, K., & Davies, D. (1996) *The Sexual Politics of Disability: Untold Desires*. New York: Cassell; McRuer, R. (2006) *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*. New York: New York University Press.

<sup>69</sup> For example: Corbett, J. (1998) *Special Educational Needs in the Twentieth Century: A Cultural Analysis*. New York: Cassell; Corker, M. (1998) *Deaf and Disabled or Deafness Disabled? Towards a Human Rights Perspective*. Buckingham/Philadelphia: Open University Press.

<sup>70</sup> Thomas, C. (2002) "Disability Theory: Key Ideas, Issues and Thinkers", 48.

<sup>71</sup> Lang, R. (2001) *The Development and Critique*, 19.

Stating that historical materialism ignores experience entirely, however, would be unjustified. Mercer, Barnes and Shakespeare explain how the social model focuses on the experience of disability, but not as something which exists purely at the level of individual psychology or even interpersonal relations. Instead, it looks at collective experiences of disability by considering a wide range of social and material factors, such as family circumstances, income and financial support, education, employment, housing and transport. Individual experiences are thus collected in an overall biography, which deals with social relationships and life histories, and addresses the circumstances of disabling barriers and attitudes in society, as well as the impact of state policies and welfare support systems.<sup>72</sup>

These criticisms mainly relate to the value of historical materialism as a theory for conceptualizing disability in the past and present. This study has no ambition to contribute to a new theorization of disability. In the remainder of this chapter, therefore, I move away from disability theory. However, the above-mentioned suggestions are taken into consideration throughout this research. By combining collective life stories with individual histories, while taking into consideration both personal characteristics such as gender, social class and environment, and environmental factors that extend beyond the scope of socio-economic structures, this study aspires to engage in the proposed experiential and differentiated approach. This way, this study wants to associate itself with what Corker and Shakespeare have identified as the challenge for disability studies: “to fully engage with the complexity of disabled peoples lives and not to render this broad range of experience within one all-encompassing model or set of ideas”.<sup>73</sup>

The historical value of the theory has been less debated. This is probably because of the general absence of historians in the field of disability studies. The difficulties in finding sources to give this theory an empirical underpinning can also be assumed to play a role. As a historian performing historical research, however, historical materialism needs a closer investigation from a historical perspective.

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<sup>72</sup> Barnes, C., Mercer, G. & Shakespeare, T. (1999) *Exploring Disability. A Sociological Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 31.

<sup>73</sup> Verstraete, P. (2007) “Towards a Disabled Past: Some Preliminary Thoughts about the History of Disability, Governmentality and Experience” *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 39/1, 57; Corker, M. & Shakespeare, T. (2002) *Disability/Postmodernity. Embodying Disability Theory*. London/New York: Continuum, 15.

### 1.2.2.2 Criticism from a historical perspective

According to historical materialist theory, disability originated in the nineteenth century, when the economic system evolved from one in which the family was the main production unit to a concept of production based on the employment of labour power rather than people, so converting all unproductive members into a burden for the family.<sup>74</sup> According to Oliver, disabled people came to be regarded as a “*social and educational problem*” and as a result they became more and more segregated in institutions of all kinds.<sup>75</sup> Two major historical processes are regarded as crucial for these developments: the rise of a capitalist society and medicalization. The growing importance of labour productivity forced disabled people out of the labour market. The social exclusion that was the outcome of this process was simultaneously justified through a seemingly objective and scientific medical discourse.

An examination of the theory from a historical perspective reveals some weaknesses.<sup>76</sup> First, the theory equates capitalism with the emergence of an industrial society. As a consequence, most disability scholars have fallen back on a rudimentary division between the Early Modern Period and nineteenth-century industrial capitalism. Historians, however, advocate a more nuanced approach to both the development of capitalism and the industrial revolution. As such, the image of a global industrial *revolution* is questioned, to the extent that within historiography one is more inclined to speak of an *evolution*.<sup>77</sup> Within histories of industrialization the focus is much more on continuity: agriculture remained the most important sector until the middle, and in some countries until the end, of the nineteenth century. Labour conditions also remained largely unchanged until deep into the nineteenth century. ‘Old’ forms of employment coincided with new production methods, even within the same household, as one member of a family could be working as a factory worker while the others might still be engaged in agricultural activities. In Belgium, according to historians Catherina Lis and Hugo Soly, only 4 percent of the population was employed in factories even well into the nineteenth century. Furthermore, for a long time industrialization was limited to growth poles such as the city of Ghent. The impact of the industrial revolution in Belgium, especially in the Flemish countryside, was only felt towards the end of the nineteenth cen-

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<sup>74</sup> Branson, J., Miller, D. (2002) *Damned for Their Difference*, 9.

<sup>75</sup> Oliver, M. (1990) *The Politics of Disablement*, 28.

<sup>76</sup> Based on: De Paepe, T. (2003) “Oost-Vlaamse mannen met een handicap. Een sociaal-demografisch onderzoek en een levensloopanalyse op basis van de conscriptieregisters” *Handelingen der Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent*, 52, 185-222.

<sup>77</sup> O'Brien, P.K. (1993) “Introduction: Modern Conceptions of the Industrial Revolution” In: O'Brien, P.K. & Quinault, R. (eds.) *The Industrial Revolution and British Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 5.

ture.<sup>78</sup> The dominance of British and American scholars advocating the social model of disability has resulted in Britain's economic development being used as a reference. However, Britain was the first to undergo an industrialization process, so it is rather doubtful whether the chronology proposed by British and American disability theorists can be transposed to other countries. Industrialization needs to be considered as a broad process that spans the whole of Europe, but runs a differentiated course in time and speed.<sup>79</sup> The model as proposed by Finkelstein and Oliver tends to neglect these historical differences.

The same objections can be raised with regard to the development of capitalism. Capitalism and the industrial revolution are often considered to be one and the same, probably because the industrial revolution occurred first in capitalist countries. However, the origins of capitalism are hotly debated among historians and many scholars situate the rise of capitalism prior to the industrial revolution. In their opinion, capitalism just reached its peak in the nineteenth century, in the development of an industrial type of capitalism. Historian Anne Borsay, in an article looking at disability in relation to early eighteenth-century mercantilism, questions the view that disability, as opposed to the presence of impairments, was something that only arose as a product of industrial capitalism. In her article she argues that the link between disability and the (in)ability to work predates industrialization and could already be found in the work ethos and economic reasoning of the early eighteenth century.<sup>80</sup> Metzler even argues that this link already existed in the later Middle Ages.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, even starting from the premise that disability emerged simultaneously with the rise of industrial capitalism, national and regional differences need to be taken into consideration. To overcome the potential distortion as a result of a different onset and intensity of industrialization, I have prolonged the period under observation to the middle of the twentieth century – the last deaf person in the study dies in 1949.<sup>82</sup> By that time, Belgium had unquestionably completed its transition to an industrial nation.

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<sup>78</sup> Lis, C. & Soly, H. (1980) *Armoede en kapitalisme in pre-industrieel Europa*. Antwerp/Amsterdam: Standaard Wetenschappelijke Uitgeverij, 137.

<sup>79</sup> Hilde Greefs, Bruno Blondé and Peter Clark, among others, have argued that Belgium's path of industrial development differed considerably from Britain's: Greefs, H., Blondé, B. & Clark, P. (2005) "The Growth of Urban Industrial Regions: Belgian Developments in Comparative Perspective, 1750-1850" In: Stobart, J. & Raven, N. (eds.) *Towns, Regions and Industries. Urban and Industrial Change in the Midlands, c. 1700-1840*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 210-27.

<sup>80</sup> Borsay, A. (1998) "Returning Patients to the Community: Disability, Medicine and Economic Rationality Before the Industrial Revolution" *Disability and Society*, 13/5, 645-63.

<sup>81</sup> Metzler, I. (2013) *A Social History of Disability in the Middle Ages. Cultural Considerations of Physical Impairment*. New York: Routledge.

<sup>82</sup> The selection procedure of the research population is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

Secondly, there is a tendency within historical materialist accounts to present the period prior to the nineteenth century as a romantic era in which society fully embraced people with disabilities. Historians Peregrine Horden and Richard Smith caution against the belief in a “*golden era*” in which people with disabilities were lovingly taken care of by relatives, in contrast to the heartless capitalist society.<sup>83</sup> In their book they discuss the belief that the recent past has experienced an evolution from informal care by relatives and the extended family to institutional care, established by the state. This belief implicitly assumes that families and caregivers are to be preferred above institutions. On the basis of trans-European research, Horden and Smith conclude that there has never been a golden age of informal care. On the contrary, private and public care have never been strictly separated. “*Public and private, formal and informal, paid and voluntary – however we describe them, the sectors cannot be kept analytically distinct.*”<sup>84</sup> According to Horden and Smith, it is not possible to allocate a simple secular rise of institutions and a decline of the family to a particular period. Instead, they claim there was a “*mixed economy of care*”, in which the role of the immediate family has been overestimated and the role of community networks and ties linking patrons and clients, benefactors and the poor need to be acknowledged.<sup>85</sup>

The historical materialist model of disability assumes a clear distinction between, on the one hand, an agrarian pre-industrial society that was characterized by immobility and dominated by family structures, and on the other a highly mobile industrial society that was subject to disruptions and dominated by state-led institutions. As I stated in this section, this assumption needs some historical nuancing. Despite the objections to the materialist perspective from within the field of disability studies and the field of history, this research aims to build on the materialist approach by responding to an observation made by Brendan Gleeson. Although the observation was made more than fifteen years ago, it is still remarkably relevant today. Gleeson, a historical materialist by nature, endorses the importance of the nineteenth-century developments in the emergence of disability. However,

*“The heretofore limited attempts to analyse the concrete situation of disabled people in the variety of feudal and industrialist capitalist societies await further empirical elaboration. There is therefore a pressing need for empirically grounded research on the social experi-*

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<sup>83</sup> Horden, P. & Smith, R. (1998) “Introduction” In: Horden, P. & Smith, R. (eds.) *The Locus of Care. Families, Communities, Institutions and the Provision of Welfare since Antiquity*. London/New York: Routledge, 1-20.

<sup>84</sup> Horden, P. (1998) “Household Care and Informal Networks: Comparisons and Continuities from Antiquity to the Present” In: Horden, P. & Smith, R. (eds.) *The Locus of Care. Families, Communities, Institutions and the Provision of Welfare since Antiquity*. London/New York: Routledge, 26.

<sup>85</sup> Horden, P. & Smith, R. (1998) “Introduction”, 5-6.

*ence of disabled people in nearly all historical societies. Such research is urgently required if materialism isn't itself to repeat the errors of conventional social science by proposing ahistorical and speculative accounts of disablement.*"<sup>86</sup>

By taking into consideration and integrating the main criticisms and historical nuances, my study aspires to empirically test the extent to which the nineteenth century can be considered as constituting a break from the eighteenth century with regard to disability and the veracity of the materialist assumption that modernization led to the emergence of *disabled people* instead of the mere presence of *people with impairments*.

### 1.3 A historical approach to disability

The history of disability has long been one of the more neglected areas within academic research. Like other under-studied groups, such as women and ethnic minorities, "*they have been marginalised historiographically*".<sup>87</sup> Moreover, disability studies that take on a historical perspective are rarely written by trained historians. This often results in historical analyses that become more and more questionable the further one goes back in time, and some even contain erroneous assumptions that reflect modern prejudices rather than mirror past realities.<sup>88</sup>

Many of the sociological, psychological and medical studies on disability make it necessary to give an outline of the foundations of contemporary reactions to disability and to provide a brief history of disability, the so-called *microscopic histories* by Gleeson. Irena Metzler divides these historical overviews into two types of texts: disability is either seen from a progressionist viewpoint, whereby the lives of disabled people have steadily improved over time, or it is treated from a pessimistic viewpoint, stating that humanity has always reacted to disability in the same, negative way. Both types of disability histories take the form of a grand *recit* that usually follows an established pattern: a section on Antiquity is followed by a paragraph on the Middle Ages, the Early Modern Period is discussed in the next section, and the rest of the book is dedicated to the Modern Period. As most historical approaches to disability reflect on the history of the development of institutions for the disabled and the idea of their special needs, or on the development of the welfare state and the increasing importance of disability within politics –

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<sup>86</sup> Gleeson, B. (1997) "Disability Studies: A Historical Materialist View", 196.

<sup>87</sup> Metzler, I. (2006) *Disability in Medieval Europe*, 11.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibidem*.

all of which are modern developments – most publications concern the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>89</sup>

Before the 1980s only a couple of writers considered the historical dimensions of disability. Brendan Gleeson and Irena Metzler in their discussion on the historiography of disability mention four notable attempts predating the 1980s to write an overall history of disability. Both refer to a book entitled *Civilisation and the Cripple*, written by British author Frederick Watson in 1930. In his book, Watson wrote a progressionist history whereby he considers medicine from the Enlightenment onwards to be the greatest benefactor of humanity. For Watson, disability was essentially a social problem that could be solved by rational and scientific approaches, through medicine and institutionalization.<sup>90</sup> On a similar note, American physician Howard Haggard wrote his *The Lame, the Halt and the Blind: The Vital Role of Medicine in the History of Civilization* (1932). Here again, the dominant discourse is progressionist: everything in the past is seen as filthy and generally unhealthy, and only modern science can save people.<sup>91</sup> Metzler also mentions a book entitled *Zerbrecht die Krücken* (Smash the Crutches), which was written by medical specialist Hans Würtz and published in Germany in 1932.<sup>92</sup> In his book, Würtz tries to break through the image of ‘crippled’ persons as unfortunate by cataloguing famous disabled people who had been prominent educators, scientists, writers, artists, politicians and so forth, in an effort to show that they were just as capable of great achievements as non-disabled people. Nevertheless, Metzler concludes, the book is permeated by a sense of benign patronization of the disabled.<sup>93</sup> After the 1930s, there was no noteworthy historical disability account until the 1970s. In 1970, Fared Haj, a blind Palestinian philosopher and pedagogue, wrote a history of disability in Islamic Antiquity.<sup>94</sup> Despite its importance, Haj’s study, like the previous books, drew little attention from within disability studies.

In the past two decades, however, new historical investigations of disability have emerged. This section does not aspire to provide a history of disability until the eighteenth century, where this research begins. Instead, I consider some of the most influen-

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<sup>89</sup> Metzler, I. (2006) *Disability in Medieval Europe*, 11-2 & 28.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibidem*; Watson, F. (1930) *Civilization and the Cripple*. London: John Bale.

<sup>91</sup> Haggard, H. (1932) *The Lame, the Halt and the Blind: The Vital Role of Medicine in the History of Civilization*. London: Heinemann.

<sup>92</sup> Würtz, H. (1932) *Zerbrecht Die Krücken. Krüppel-Probleme der Menschheit. Schicksalsstiefkinder aller Zeiten und Völker in Wort und Bild*. Leipzig: Leopold Voss.

<sup>93</sup> Metzler, I. (2006) *Disability in Medieval Europe*, 13-4.

<sup>94</sup> Haj, F. (1970) *Disability in Antiquity*. New York: Philosophical Library.



tial historical disability studies, which can serve as a good starting point for more in-depth reading, in a chronological overview from Antiquity to the present.

The collection *Disabilities in Roman Antiquity*, edited by historians Christian Laes, Chris Goodey and Martha L. Rose was one of the first attempts to systematically study the subject of disabilities in the ancient Roman world. Ten years earlier, Martha L. Rose had written a book-length synthesis on disabilities in ancient Greece. Robert Garland provided an introduction to the Graeco-Roman world as a whole in his 2010 book.<sup>95</sup> In their contributions, the authors engage with rare literary, papyrological, and epigraphical sources, as well as iconographic and osteo-archaeological evidence to discover how impairment was culturally perceived.

The publications of Irena Metzler are landmarks for the history of disability in the medieval period. According to Metzler, interest in the disability history of the Middle Ages has been limited up until now because histories of disability have concentrated either on a view of disability based on medical advancements – and the Middle Ages were considered a period of stagnation – or if they did examine specific historical epochs prior to the Modern Period, they have concentrated on the culture of classical Antiquity and the familiar classical body. Nonetheless, some fruitful insights into disability in the Middle Ages can be found in the books of Irena Metzler, Joshua R. Eyler and Wendy J. Turner and Tory V. Pearman.<sup>96</sup> Some notable article-length discussions have been written by Walton Schalick, Lois Bragg and Edward Wheatley.<sup>97</sup>

Studies into disability in the Early Modern Period are also few and far between. Margaret A. Winzer argues that in the period before 1800, life for exceptional people was characterized by “*a series of unmitigated hardships*”. Their lives were severely limited by

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<sup>95</sup> Laes, C., Goodey, C.F. & Rose, M.L. (eds.) (2013) *Disabilities in Roman Antiquity. Disparate Bodies a Capite ad Calcem*. Leiden: Brill; Rose, M.L. (2003) *The Staff of Oedipus. Transforming Disability in Ancient Greece*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press; Garland, R. (2010) *The Eye of the Beholder. Deformity and Disability in the Graeco-Roman World*. London: Bristol Classical Press. For a status quaestionis of disability articles for Roman Antiquity the 2008 article by Christian Laes and the 2011 paper by Joannes Stahl are a good starting point: Laes, C. (2012) “How Does one Do the History of Disability in Antiquity? One Thousand Years of Case Studies” *Medicina nei Secoli*, 23/3, 915-46; Stahl, J. (2011) “Physically Deformed and Disabled People” In: Peachin, M. (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 715-33.

<sup>96</sup> Metzler, I. (2006) *Disability in Medieval Europe*; Metzler, I. (2013) *A Social History of Disability in the Middle Ages. Cultural Considerations of Physical Impairment*. New York: Routledge; Eyler, J.R. (2010) *Disability in the Middle Ages. Reconsiderations and Reverberations*. Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate Publishing; Pearman, T.V. & Turner, W.J. (2010) *The Treatment of Disabled Persons in Medieval Europe: Examining Disability in the Historical, Legal, Literary, Medical, and Religious Discourses of the Middle Ages*. Lewiston/New York: Edwin Mellen Press.

<sup>97</sup> Schalick, W.O. (2005) “History of Disability: Medieval West” In: Albrecht, G.L. (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Disability*. Oaks: SAGE publications, 868-73; Bragg, L. (1997) “From the Mute God to the Lesser God: Disability in Medieval Celtic and Old Norse Literature” *Disability & Society*, 12/2, 165-77; Wheatley, E. (2007) “Medieval Constructions of Blindness in Medieval England and France” In: Davis, L.J. (ed.) *The Disability Studies Reader*. New York, 63-73.

superstition and widely held fatalism; once they were perceived as being different they were “*destroyed, exorcised, ignored, exiled, exploited – or set apart because some were even considered divine.*”<sup>98</sup> Philologist Lindsey D. Row-Heyveld takes a philosophical and cultural approach in her dissertation on the performance of the non-standard body in early modern England and argues that the fear of false disability – non-disabled people pretending to be disabled was rife in early modern England – led to the country’s first legal definition of disability and played a central role in the cultural creation of a disability identity in theatre and literature.<sup>99</sup> From a similar cultural perspective, philologists Allison P. Hobgood and David H. Wood have studied a wide variety of early modern texts and cultural expressions to discuss the representations of difference and disability in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England.<sup>100</sup> In 2012 historian David Turner published his *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England*, the first book-length study of physical disability in eighteenth-century England. In his book he explores the languages of disability, the relationship between religious and medical discourses on disability and looks into popular images of people with disabilities.<sup>101</sup>

While disability in the period before 1800 remains largely uncharted territory by historians, studies into the last two centuries are more numerous.<sup>102</sup>

In her 2005 book on institutional and community living of the disabled in Britain from 1750 onwards, Anne Borsay argues that disabled people have been excluded from the full rights of citizenship since 1750 because they have been marginal to the labour market. This exclusion has been additionally aggravated by divisive practices such as separate schooling and institutionalization. Although Borsay’s book is described as the first attempt to place disability policies in Britain within a historical framework, Borsay, who has a background in medical humanities, fails to subject the topic to a full historical inquiry, with the most striking example being the shortage of primary sources.<sup>103</sup> By

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<sup>98</sup> Winzer, M.A. (1997) “Disability and Society before the Eighteenth Century. Dread and Despair” In: Davis, L.J. (ed.) *The Disability Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 76.

<sup>99</sup> Row-Heyveld, L.D. (2011) *Dissembling Disability: Performances of the Non-Standard Body in Early Modern England*. University of Iowa (unpublished PhD dissertation) <<http://ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4863&context=t=etd>>, consulted on 03/10/2014.

<sup>100</sup> Hobgood, A.P. & Wood, D.H. (2013) *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

<sup>101</sup> Turner, D.M. (2012) *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England: Imagining Physical Impairment*. New York: Routledge.

<sup>102</sup> A bibliography for the nineteenth century can be found in the online database “Nineteenth-century Disability: Cultures & Contexts”, <<http://www.nineteenthcenturydisability.org/bibliography>>.

<sup>103</sup> Borsay, A. (2005) *Disability and Social Policy*; Kowalsky, M. (2005) “Review of ‘Disability and Social Policy in Britain since 1750: A History of Exclusion’, (review no.453)”, <<http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/453>>, consulted on 26/12/2013.

contrast, primary sources such as memoirs, letters and court proceedings are central to historian Iain Hutchison's study on disability in nineteenth-century Scotland. In his book, Hutchinson considers the ways in which disability was perceived in the popular and official culture of nineteenth-century Scotland and provides an empirical understanding of the disability experience and its representation during a period of industrialization, urbanization and change.<sup>104</sup> *The New Disability History*, written by historians Paul Longmore and Lauri Umansky, provides an American history of disability in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The authors bring together fourteen essays about disability and disabled people, with the majority dealing with the late nineteenth to early twentieth century as this is considered "a moment of major redefinition for disabled lives, disability policy, and disability history".<sup>105</sup> Other works have approached disability from a more cultural perspective, including Lillian Craton's study on Victorian freak shows in nineteenth-century fiction, Rosemary G. Thomson's survey on *Extraordinary Bodies* within American culture and literature, and the article by Iain Davidson, Gary Woodill and Elizabeth Bredberg on images of disability in nineteenth-century British children's literature.<sup>106</sup>

Some authors have not limited themselves to a specific period in time and have dared to write a chronological overview of disability history that spans several centuries, even millennia. I am not referring to the studies such as those mentioned above, which provide a short historical overview as a precursor to a contemporary study, but to full historical overviews. One very notable example is the book written by French academic Henri-Jacques Stiker: *Corps infirmes et sociétés* (1982). According to Stiker, we need to explain contemporary societal responses to disability by looking at earlier historical periods because "we illuminate a question better by following its development through time than by trying to fix it in a false eternal moment." While he believes that the perception of disability has changed, older views continue to shape more contemporary views on disability. Thus history is important for shedding light on the present.<sup>107</sup> In 1997 *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability* was published, edited by disability scholars

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<sup>104</sup> Hutchison, I. (2007) *A History of Disability in Nineteenth-Century Scotland*. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press.

<sup>105</sup> Longmore, P.K. & Umansky, L. (eds.) (2001) *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*. New York: New York University Press; Bruggemann, B.J. Bruggemann on Longmore and Umansky, 'The New Disability History: American Perspectives'. <<https://networks.h-net.org/node/4189/reviews/5458/bruggemann-longmore-and-umansky-new-disability-history-american>>, consulted on 08/01/2014.

<sup>106</sup> Craton, L. (2009) *The Victorian Freak Show: The Significance of Disability and Physical Differences in 19th-Century Fiction*. London: Cambria Press; Thomson, R.G. (1997) *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press; Davidson, I., Woodill, G. & Bredberg, E. (1994) "Images of Disability in 19th Century British Children's Literature" *Disability & Society*, 9/1, 33-46.

<sup>107</sup> Stiker, H.J. (2000) *A History of Disability*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 13.

David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder. In this volume, Mitchell and Snyder assemble 14 essays that “seek to unearth and understand the varied attitudes that have characterized disability across history and cultures”.<sup>108</sup> The different papers aim to describe and analyse how physically impaired individuals were represented in a specific historical context, and within American and European literature. Central to the essays is the intersection between representations of disability and representations of gender, race, class, and nationalist issues and ideologies.<sup>109</sup> The social perception of disability in history was the focal point in Herbert Covey’s sociological study, which was published a year later. In his book, Covey aims to uncover the social experiences of people with different types of disabilities throughout Western history. Six of the seven chapters focus on individuals with a particular type of disability to see how they fared from ancient times to the nineteenth century.<sup>110</sup> The book was enthusiastically received, but reviewers did not spare it from criticism. Historian Edward Berkowitz states it lacks historical detail and consequently points to a series of generalizations about change over time.<sup>111</sup> Historian Walt Schalick points to some important omissions in Covey’s overview of major historical contexts, such as the social drive of eugenics and its consequences, and to his limited range of references as his bibliography is confined to sources written in English.<sup>112</sup> Similarly, a more popularized account dealing with attitudes towards people with disabilities from Antiquity to the present in Western Europe was published in Belgium by Ben Wuyts.<sup>113</sup> Besides a chronological overview in six chapters, Wuyts discerns six dominant images and perceptions that appear in all time periods, either separately or intertwined. According to Wuyts, people with disabilities have been perceived as incomplete, unhappy, weak, abnormal, disadvantaged and equal, though the latter is only considered applicable to contemporary society.

Starting from a Western perspective, the above-mentioned publications all tell a European or American history of disability. A unique equivalent to these European histories is the collection by anthropologists Benedicte Ingstad and Susan Reynolds, which high-

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<sup>108</sup> Mitchell, D.T. & Snyder, S.L. (eds.) (1997) *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 19.

<sup>109</sup> Parrish, P.A. & Parrish, L.H. (1999) “The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability by David T. Mitchell; Sharon L. Snyder. Review by: Paul A. Parrish and Linda Hudson Parrish” *South Central Review*, 16/1, 109-11.

<sup>110</sup> Covey, H.C. (1998) *Social Perceptions of People with Disabilities in History*. Springfield: Charles C. Thomas.

<sup>111</sup> Berkowitz, E.D. (1999) “Social Perceptions of People with Disabilities in History (review)” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 73/3, 543-4.

<sup>112</sup> Schalck, W. (1999) “Social Perceptions of People with Disabilities in History (review)” *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 340, 1518.

<sup>113</sup> Wuyts, B. (2005) *Over narren, kreupelen, doven en blinden. Leven met een handicap van de Oudheid tot nu*. Leuven: Davidsfonds.

lights the different constructions of disability in non-European and non-North American settings.<sup>114</sup> Nonetheless, people mainly interested in the history of disability are likely to remain unsatisfied as the ethnographic case studies mostly focus on the role of the disabled individual as embedded within a particular family or community, without much acknowledgement of a broader historical context.<sup>115</sup> So far, there has been no comprehensive history of disability outside the Western world.

The publications discussed in this literature overview serve only as a starting point for a comprehensive bibliography of disability history. By focusing on studies approaching disability from a more general historical perspective, this overview overlooks a vast number of more thematic books and articles that deal with a specific disability and/or age groups, or focus on specific aspects of disability such as institutionalization and special education.<sup>116</sup> Moreover, as disability is increasingly considered a new important social category, on a par with gender, social class and race, disability becomes more and more integrated into studies with an historical interest in pauperism, employment, legislation and so forth.

## 1.4 A history of the deaf

In most of the above-mentioned publications, deaf individuals are peripheral to the general history of disability. In this section, I provide a concise, though not comprehensive overview of the publications specifically dealing with the history of the deaf. By illuminating what is known about the deaf in the past and then indicating what is not known, I show how this research can contribute to our historical understanding of deaf lives.

Bibliographies of publications in the field of deaf studies and deaf history or a quick search on the internet immediately show the vast number of publications on the

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<sup>114</sup> Ingstad, B. & Whyte, S.R. (eds.) (1995) *Disability and Culture*. California: University of California Press.

<sup>115</sup> Kaufert, J.M. (1997) "Disability and Culture by Benedicte Ingstad; Susan Reynolds Whyte. Review by: Joseph M. Kaufert" *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 11/3, 404-6.

<sup>116</sup> E.g. Van Cleve, J.V. (ed.) (2007) *The Deaf History Reader*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press; Koestler, F.A. (1976, 2004) *The Unseen Minority: A Social History of Blindness in the United States*. New York: D. McKay Co; Safford, P.L. & Safford, E.J. (1996) *A History of Childhood and Disability*. New York/London: Teachers College Press; Braddock, D.L. & Parish, S.L. (2001) "An Institutional History of Disability" In: Albrecht, G.L., Bury, M. & Seelman, K.D. (eds.) *Handbook of Disability Studies*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 11-68; Winzer, M.A. (1993) *The History of Special Education: From Isolation to Integration*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press.

topic.<sup>117</sup> In the field of deaf studies, publications mainly focus on aspects of inclusion related to deaf education, the contribution of hearing technologies such as cochlear implants, issues of language and communication and the characteristics of the deaf community and culture.<sup>118</sup> These present-day points of interest are reflected in publications dealing with the history of the deaf. The large majority of publications on deaf history are concerned with the origin and development of deaf education and the changing attitudes towards their ways of communicating (sign language and speech). For Belgium and to some extent for Europe, brother Maurice Buyens provides a popularized general overview of the development of deaf education through the ages. Besides some national summaries, he sketches a detailed account of the origin, history and boards of the different schools for deaf boys and girls that emerged in nineteenth-century Belgium.<sup>119</sup> Similarly, Susan Plann wrote a history of deaf education in Spain, Marjoke Rietveld-Van Wingerden for the Netherlands and Howard G. Williams for Russia.<sup>120</sup> Francois Buton describes the French educational system and argues that the deaf school of Paris was the only school in the nineteenth century that was capable of stopping the institutional and pedagogical fragmentation that afflicted general deaf education in that period.<sup>121</sup> Margaret Winzer, in her study into the history of special education in Europe and North America, dedicates much attention to the history of deaf education, such as the first type of special school to emerge.<sup>122</sup> A comprehensive overview of deaf education worldwide can be found in *Deaf People around the World*. This collection by more than 50 scholars provides an overview of social and educational issues in over 30 nations. Each contribution addresses several topics, including the history of the national deaf education system.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> E.g. <<http://www.deaflibrary.org/bibliography.html>>; <<http://dbhdid.ky.gov/dbh/files/DHHSLeaningLibrary.pdf>>

<sup>118</sup> E.g. Marschark, M. & Spencer, P.E. (2011) *The Oxford Handbook of Deaf Studies, Language, and Education*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>119</sup> Buyens, M. (2005) *De dove persoon, zijn gebarentaal en het dovenonderwijs*. Antwerp: Garant.

<sup>120</sup> Plann, S. (1997) *A Silent Minority: Deaf Education in Spain, 1550-1835*. California: University of California Press; Rietveld-Van Wingerden, M. & Tijsseling, C. (2010) *Ontplooiing door communicatie: geschiedenis van het onderwijs aan doven en slechthorenden in Nederland*. Antwerp: Garant; Williams, H.G. (1993) "Deaf Teachers in 19th Century Russia" In: Lane, H. & Fischer, R. (eds.) *Looking Back. A Reader on the History of Deaf Communities and Their Sign Languages*. Hamburg: Signum, 109-19.

<sup>121</sup> Buton, F. (2008) "L'education des sourds-muets au xixe siècle. Description d'une activité sociale" *Le Mouvement Social*, 2/223, 69-82.

<sup>122</sup> Winzer, M.A. (1993) *The History of Special Education*. These publications are just a few of the vast number of studies dealing with national deaf cultural histories and education.

<sup>123</sup> Miller, M.S. & Moores, D.F. (eds.) (2009) *Deaf People around the World: Educational and Social Perspectives*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press. For more on the development and characteristics of deaf education, see in

This study aspires to shed light on personal experiences of deafness. Studies with a similar interest in the day-to-day living circumstances of the deaf in the past are more difficult to find. Nonetheless, several authors have expressed ambitions to uncover the hidden experiences of the deaf, some making their intentions clear by assigning *experience* a central place in the titles of their studies. In 1994 deaf scientist Harry G. Lang published his *Silence of the Spheres, the Deaf Experience in the History of Science*.<sup>124</sup> In his book, Lang discusses issues surrounding technological development, eugenics and the difficulties deaf men and women faced in their scientific endeavours from the Enlightenment onwards. Despite the importance of Lang's contribution with regard to our knowledge of the prominent role of deaf scientists in history, the stories that are told only reflect the experiences of a small group of deaf persons and, once more, they are closely tied to educational matters. The same author, in his contribution to the *Deaf History Reader*, identified deaf individuals in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century American literature and used the texts to evaluate the lives and communication methods of deaf children, men and women.<sup>125</sup> Based on biographical stories, Lang suggests that many deaf people lived a full and autonomous life in Colonial America, but could also suffer from oppression as a result of their deafness. Nevertheless, Lang admits that the evidence does not provide information about a "core congregation" of deaf people living in that period as he had to deal with the insurmountable bias towards exceptional or elitist lives in the textual material available. In his 2006 book *The Deaf Experience: Classics in Language and Education*, Harlan Lane made use of the writings of deaf and hearing leaders (1764-1840) on issues surrounding deaf education, activism and the deaf community. In different essays, Lane discusses excerpts from the writings of deaf author Pierre Desloges, prominent leaders Saboureux de Fontenay and Jean Massieu, educationalists Charles-Michel de l'Épée and Roch-Ambroise Sicard, and deaf teacher and writer Ferdinand Berthier. The *experience* Lane refers to in his title is therefore more the experience of the nineteenth-century founders of deaf education and leaders of a developing deaf community, rather than the experience of an ordinary deaf population.

Similar objections can be raised to the writings of other scholars that aimed to write a more general history of the deaf. Despite the claim of Van Cleve's *Deaf History Reader* to "bring together a remarkably vivid depiction of the varied Deaf experience in America"<sup>126</sup>, the book predominantly tells the history of the formation and the cultural characteristics of

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the bibliography: Bender (1970), Orest (1976), Baynton (1997, 1999), Sayers (1999), Burch (2002), Verstraete (2009), De Clerck (2009).

<sup>124</sup> Lang, H.G. (1994) *Silence of the Spheres. The Deaf Experience in the History of Science*. London: Bergin & Garvey.

<sup>125</sup> Lang, H.G. (2007) "Genesis of a Community: The American Deaf Experience in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries" In: Van Cleve, J.V. (ed.) *The Deaf History Reader*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 1-23.

<sup>126</sup> Quoted from the publishing agency: <http://gupress.gallaudet.edu/bookpage/DHRbookpage.html>

the modern deaf community, while generally ignoring important factors such as race, gender and class. As a result, it is mainly composed of stories about extraordinary accomplishments of deaf persons and issues of education and language.<sup>127</sup> The focus on exceptional lives also characterizes the study of *Deaf People Who Changed the World* by linguists Cathryn Carroll and Susan M. Mather.<sup>128</sup> Per Eriksson's history of the deaf can, as the title indicates, best be described as "a collection of facts".<sup>129</sup> In his book, Eriksson draws up a chronological overview of important events in the history of the deaf, with an emphasis on the development of deaf education and its protagonists. Finally, although presented as a history of the deaf, Lane's *When the Mind Hears* is actually about the historical oppression of sign language by public figures and institutions. In his book, Lane traces the history of two sign language communities, in France and America, from the mid-eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>130</sup> Most of it is written from the perspective of Laurent Clerc, a famous deaf educator. In the book, Clerc may be "speaking his own history", but reveals little about the personal histories of the deaf.

Despite their contribution to our general knowledge of deaf history, none of these writings provides insight into the ways in which ordinary deaf men and women lived their lives. The difficulties in locating deaf individuals in historical sources, let alone finding sources that extend beyond an occasional snapshot in time, probably explains this lacuna in historiography. Professor in deaf studies H-Dirksen L. Bauman compares the quest for historical evidence of deafness to looking for fireflies: "the field is mostly dark, except for scattered moments of illumination." Bauman explains the lack of sources through the fact that for a long time deaf people could only rely on forms of manual languages. Without access to a written system of communication, few opportunities presented themselves to "preserve thoughts beyond the moment of utterance".<sup>131</sup> In spite of the establishment of deaf education in the beginning of the nineteenth century and with it the gentle spread of literacy among the deaf, sources reporting the silent voices of the deaf are hard to find. Nevertheless, some scholars have succeeded in revealing personal stories of deaf men and women in the past, or have at least explored the possibilities of

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<sup>127</sup> Van Cleve, J.V. (ed.) (2007) *The Deaf History Reader*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press.

<sup>128</sup> Carroll, C. & Mather, S.M. (1997) *Movers and Shakers: Deaf people Who Changed the World*. San Diego: Dawn Sign Press.

<sup>129</sup> Eriksson, P. (1993) *Dövas Historia: En faktasamling, Del 1. (The History of the Deaf: A Collection of Facts, part 1)*. Örebro: National Swedish Agency for Special Education; Eriksson, P. (1998) *The History of Deaf People. A Source Book*. Örebro: Daufu.

<sup>130</sup> Lane, H. (1989) *When the Mind Hears: A History of the Deaf*. New York: Random House.

<sup>131</sup> Bauman, D.-H. L. (2002) "Review: A Mighty Change: An Anthology of Deaf American Writing 1816-1864 (C. Krentz)" *Sign Language Studies*, 2/4, 452-9.



doing so. In a chronological - from Antiquity to the nineteenth century - and source-based overview, I present some of these studies which are more successful in exploring personal experiences of deafness.

Historian M. Lynn Rose, in her article about the *Deaf and Dumb in Ancient Greece*, indicates that classical Antiquity left too little material to attempt a reconstruction of the everyday lives of deaf people. The closest one can observe everyday life for deaf people is through a partial and literary elitist reconstruction of attitudes towards deaf people. Rose identifies two important Greek assumptions about deaf people. First, deafness went hand in hand with muteness and second, muteness indicated diminished worth. For the Greeks, according to Rose, deafness was firstly an intellectual impairment because of the difficulties in communication that result from deafness. However, while in the higher circles of society deafness, and by consequence muteness and perceived unintelligence, led to an exclusion from the political and intellectual arena and therefore exclusion from all that mattered, the majority of people in the Greek world were interested in farming and probably far less concerned with a person's communication skills.<sup>132</sup> A similar exposition was given by Christian Laes for ancient Rome.<sup>133</sup> In his article, Laes suggests that being deaf-mute was a bigger problem for the elite than for the lower classes. For a deaf person from a lower class it would have been fairly easy to perform manual tasks and agricultural labour, and to establish some basic way of communicating with their family.

Authors studying disablement in the Middle Ages are also largely silent with regard to the experiences of people with a hearing impairment. According to historian Aude de Saint-Loup, records of deaf people can be found in hagiographies, medical treatises and iconographies. The latter is the starting point for his analysis of images of the deaf in medieval Western Europe. In his article, de Saint-Loup concludes that reactions towards the deaf were diverse: both rejection and integration existed simultaneously. Moreover, he suggests that the deaf were less disadvantaged in the Middle Ages than people with other types of disabilities because of the importance of gestures and pictures within medieval societies.<sup>134</sup> Based on similar sources, Irena Metzler discusses the subject of deafness within medieval medicine and natural philosophy, as well as some medieval examples of miracles performed on deaf people. However, as Metzler admits, normative texts, such as medical, theological and hagiographical material, mainly tell us what non-

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<sup>132</sup> Rose, M.L. (2006) "Deaf and Dumb in Ancient Greece" In: Davis, L.J. (ed.) *The Disability Studies Reader* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Routledge, 17-32.

<sup>133</sup> Laes, C. (2011) "Silent Witnesses: Deaf-mutes in Graeco-Roman Antiquity" *Classical World*, 104/4, 451-73.

<sup>134</sup> De Saint-Loup, A. (1993) "Images of the Deaf in Medieval Western Europe" In: Lane, H. & Fischer, R. (eds.) *Looking Back. A Reader on the History of Deaf Communities and Their Sign Languages*. Hamburg: Signum, 379-402.

disabled people thought about the disabled, rather than representing lived experiences.<sup>135</sup> English professor Mikee Delony analyses Chaucer's deafened Wife of Bath from *The Canterbury Tales*, but he admits this is a fictional construction of a medieval female body, rather than of a lived female body.<sup>136</sup>

Scholars interested in the seventeenth and later centuries have been more successful in retrieving sources that mention deaf men and women. Their creative approach to different types of sources led to the publication of some noteworthy studies.

A more comprehensive attempt to study the daily lived experiences of the deaf can be found in historian Emily Cockayne's study of early modern England. On the basis of contemporary literature, county records and diaries, Cockayne analysed the opportunities available to the deaf to communicate, work, enjoy legal protection, and be involved in religious life. In her article, Cockayne states that congenital deafness could result in a variety of experiences, not all of them necessarily calamitous. Crucial for determining the individual circumstances of a deaf person were the era in which they were born, the wealth and status of the family and the size of the community. Reactions of non-disabled individuals, according to Cockayne, were mixed and dependent on the degree of contact they had with deaf people. She concludes that congenitally deaf persons were "*neither ostracized nor institutionalized, but were considered to be part of early modern society.*"<sup>137</sup> Cockayne's article rightly emphasized the variety of experiences of deaf men and women. However, the small number of primary sources on which the study is based makes her conclusion not all that convincing and the reader is left somewhat confused as it is not clear to what extent the few anecdotes reach beyond the personal level.

Historian Hannah Joyner too made use of a wide variety of sources to write her *From Pity to Pride, Growing Up Deaf in the Old South*, a history of the plight of deaf children growing up in the South of the United States in the years before and during the Civil War. To tell the life stories of the deaf children and their families, Joyner makes use of letters, school records, texts and other sources written in the middle of the nineteenth century. The sources express the dichotomy that characterized the lives of deaf people in the South: "*dichotomies of misfortune and fortune; separation and community; oppression and opportunity; and failure and success*". In the first part of the book, Joyner highlights the per-

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<sup>135</sup> Metzler, I. (2013) *A Social History of Disability in the Middle Ages*; Harvey, K. (2013) "Review: A Social History of Disability in the Middle Ages" *Reviews in History*, <<http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1517>>, consulted on 02/01/2014.

<sup>136</sup> Delony, M. (2010) "Alisoun's Aging, Hearing-Impaired Female Body: Gazing at the Wife of Bath in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*" In: Pearman, T.V. & Turner, W.J. (eds.) *The Treatment of Disabled Persons in Medieval Europe: Examining Disability in the Historical, Legal, Literary, Medical, and Religious Discourses of the Middle Ages*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 313-45.

<sup>137</sup> Cockayne, E. (2003) "Experiences of the Deaf in Early Modern England" *The Historical Journal*, 46/3, 493-510.

spective of the parents of deaf children and chronicles the difficult decisions parents had to make in choosing medical treatment and education. Part two of the book describes the good fortune the families experienced by living in a golden age of deaf education in the United States, which was however interrupted by the devastation of the Civil War. Nevertheless, Joyner shows how the war presented some deaf people with the opportunity to become successful and rise from a position of pity to one of pride in society. In telling the different life stories, Joyner shows how the perception of the families of the lives of their deaf child or sibling as characterized by tragedy and loss often contrasted to the actual lives the deaf created for themselves. The downside of Joyner's book is the one-sided focus on prominent well-to-do families in the South, which is a result of the lack of sources.<sup>138</sup>

On the basis of predominantly oral sources, anthropologist Nora Groce tells the story of Martha's Vineyard between the 1600s and 1900s in *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language*.<sup>139</sup> During this period, the American island of Martha's Vineyard was characterized by a sizeable deaf community, as a result of a recessive gene for deafness in many of the early settlers and a high rate of intermarriage within the island population. In the twentieth century, however, the situation dissipated as marriage patterns changed and migration to the mainland increased. Personal memories of elderly inhabitants of the island are combined with quantitative data collected in America and England to study a community in which deaf and hearing people lived together harmoniously, sharing a common language. Based on stories of her interviewees, Groce describes how deaf and hearing inlanders were both completely integrated in matters of marriage, schools, employment, social activities, legal responsibilities,... to the extent that deafness was no longer considered a disability. Groce's study provides a detailed account of the experiences of deaf people within a historical community. However, as she herself indicates, the Vineyard society was in sharp contrast with the attitudes towards deaf people in many other regions. As such, Groce's book, by describing a rather unique situation, provides a general illustration of how experiences of deaf people need to be understood within a broader sociocultural context.

Not only informal oral sources, however, enable to reconstruct the experiences of deaf people in the past. Formal judicial records formed the starting point of the studies by Rosenfeld, Stone and Woll. The focus on the development of deaf education in deaf

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<sup>138</sup> Joyner, H. (2004) *From Pity to Pride. Growing Up Deaf in the Old South*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press; Baynton, D.C. (2005) "Review: From Pity to Pride: Growing up Deaf in the Old South (H. Joyner)" *Sign Language Studies*, 5/4, 497-505; Foley, P.C. (2005) "Review: From Pity to Pride: Growing up Deaf in the Old South (H. Joyner)" *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 25/3. <<http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/600/777>>, consulted on 31/12/2013.

<sup>139</sup> Groce, N. (1985) *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language: Hereditary Deafness on Martha's Vineyard*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

historiography creates the impression that all eighteenth- and nineteenth-century deaf men and women lived educated and exemplary lives. However, as historian Sophia Rosenfeld states, in reality “most deaf people in France were not disciples of Epée or Sicard, but impoverished and undereducated peasants or labourers”. Indeed, ordinary deaf people often acted in ways that society considered deviant and immoral. Before the late eighteenth century, before ideas about the learning capacity of deaf persons changed, criminal acts by deaf people were simply dismissed as the result of their supposed inhumanity or monstrosity, and never attracted much attention. When in the last years of the century, in the context of the “reinvention of the deaf as model citizens”, French courts found themselves faced with several crimes committed by deaf-mute citizens, however, moral and legal questions arose about the legal status of individuals without knowledge of conventional language. A series of late eighteenth-century trials involving deaf-mute criminals quickly evolved into *causes célèbres*. In her article, Rosenfeld discusses three of these famous cases to illustrate the peculiar interrelations between language, citizenship and the law that confronted deaf people in late eighteenth-century France.<sup>140</sup> Similarly, linguists Christopher Stone and Bencie Woll analysed 31 eighteenth- and nineteenth-century proceedings of the London Central Criminal Court that involved deaf people. According to the authors, the proceedings are invaluable in providing information about deaf people’s experiences within the court system and about their communication before the establishment of deaf education. Moreover, they are an important source for illuminating attitudes toward deaf people in the period immediately before and after the creation of deaf schools in Britain.<sup>141</sup> Both articles show how a creative use of sources can shed light on the hidden lives of the deaf. Despite the importance of both contributions, however, we only gain insight into a specific, and probably rather exceptional part of the deaf population – those, predominantly men, who had committed a crime.

Several scholars have discovered (auto)biographical material that enabled them to discuss individual experiences of deafness. Education scientist Elizabeth Bredberg examines the autobiography of Walter Geikie, a deaf Edinburgh artist (1795-1837). The life of the artist is presented as “an instance of the experiences of a profoundly deaf person at a time when expectations of society regarding the education and socialization of deaf people was in progress of expansion”.<sup>142</sup> In a similar way, historian Anne Quartararo investigates the cul-

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<sup>140</sup> Rosenfeld, S. (1997) “Deaf Men on Trial: Language and Deviancy in Late Eighteenth-Century France” *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 21/2, 157-75.

<sup>141</sup> Stone, C. & Woll, B. (2008) “Dumb O Jemmy and Others: Deaf People, Interpreters, and the London Courts in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries” *Sign Language Studies*, 8/3, 226-40.

<sup>142</sup> Bredberg, E. (1995) “Walter Geikie: The Life, Schooling and Work of a Deaf Artist at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century” *Disability & Society*, 10/1, 21-38.

tural and educational ideas of the deaf French poet-teacher Pierre Pélissier (1814-1863). In the verses Pélissier wrote as a young poet, according to Quartararo, he captured many of the social frustrations deaf people faced in a dominantly hearing world.<sup>143</sup> Breda Carty, Susannah Macready, and Edna Edith Sayers tell the life story of the deaf couple Sarah and Matthew Pratt, who lived a fairly typical New England life in the seventeenth century, based on the report by contemporary writer Increase Mather. In the article, they analyse Sarah and Matthew's family, education, signing and participation in the life of their community. As Mather also discusses a wide range of international sources on deaf people's education, communication and spirituality, her writing is also employed to understand what seventeenth-century people knew about deafness.<sup>144</sup> These articles give us a unique picture of how deaf people have handled their deafness from a personal perspective and shaped their lives according to the setting in which they lived. Ego-documents are, however, rare and force scholars to ask questions about their generalizability.

In exceptional cases, more extensive collections of personal documents by deaf people are found. Educationalists Agnes Tellings and Corrie Tijsseling were able to use 73 letters written by 35 deaf ex-pupils of the Dutch Guyot Institute for the Deaf at the beginning of the nineteenth century, to study how deaf persons managed to live in a hearing society and how they viewed themselves. On the basis of the letters, they conclude that all the deaf authors had busy social lives and did not seem to experience discrimination, although they admitted communication with the hearing was not always easy. Nevertheless, those who had a partner all mentioned that their partners were hearing and that communication with them worked well. They considered themselves to be useful members of society and expressed a deep gratitude towards the school that had provided their education.<sup>145</sup> These letters are a unique source into the lives of the deaf. However, as Tellings and Tijsseling themselves indicate, it is not clear to what extent the letters only reflect the situation of the happy few able to write a letter. They counter this objection by stating that the letter writers represent a quarter to a half of the deaf graduates in their years of graduation. It is, however, not clear how the number of graduates relates to the deaf population in general and the analysis can be accused of

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<sup>143</sup> Quartararo, A.T. (2008) "The Poetry of a Minority Community: Deaf Poet Pierre Pélissier and the Formation of a Deaf Identity in the 1850's" *Sign Language Studies*, 8/3, 241-63.

<sup>144</sup> Carty, B., Macready, S. & Sayers, E.E. (2009) "A Grave and Gracious Woman: Deaf People and Signed Language in Colonial New England" *Sign Language Studies*, 9/3, 287-323. See also Part 2 in: Snoddon, K. (ed.)(2014) *Telling Deaf Lives. Agents of Change*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press. Part 2 consists of a cluster of articles that looks at the lives and endeavours of nineteenth- and twentieth-century deaf pioneers.

<sup>145</sup> Tellings, A. & Tijsseling, C. (2005) "An Unhappy and Utterly Pitiabale Creature? Life and Self-Images of Deaf People in the Netherlands at the Time of the Founding Fathers of Deaf Education" *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 10/2, 193-202.

taking an uncritical approach to the letters. The possibility of a selective preservation of the letters by the school administration – only the letters that reflect the successful outcome of an education – is not considered, and neither are the motives behind the writing of the letters. The article by Tellings and Tijsseling shows how sources preserved in an institutional setting can be used to tell personal stories.

Finally, to leave the Western world, the article of Michael Miles provides a nice illustration of the wide range of textual sources that could contribute to the study of experience-based cultural histories of deaf Africans up to the 1950s. The sources he describes vary from travellers' accounts, legal and genealogical records, institutional and missionary archives, and linguistic studies to literature, folklore, religious narrative, mime, dance and drama.<sup>146</sup> Also the study of anthropologist Karen Nakamura is worth mentioning. She used a wide array of sources, collected through the combination of field techniques of anthropology, archival research and political analysis, to gather information on deaf movements and the development of deaf identities in Japan in the postwar period.<sup>147</sup>

As illustrated, there have been successful attempts to uncover the lived experiences of deaf men and women in the past. By using different types of sources and approaches, scholars have put various aspects of the life courses of deaf persons in the spotlight. Still, there are significant limitations so far. A common feature of many of the writings discussed, however, is their limited range. In some cases, articles tell the story of one deaf person. Others have access to information that is limited to a specific group within the deaf population, including restrictions with regard to gender, age and social class, or to a specific phase in life, such as shortly after graduation or in times of wrongdoing. A study such as mine that spans the entire life course of a large group of deaf individuals can help to fill the gaps in the studies available.

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<sup>146</sup> Miles, M. (2004) "Locating Deaf People, Gesture and Sign in African Histories, 1450's-1950's" *Disability & Society*, 19/5, 531-45.

<sup>147</sup> Nakamura, K. (2006) *Deaf in Japan: Signing and the Politics of Identity*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.



## 2 Research population, method and context

Chapter 1 provided this study with a theoretical and historiographical framework. In chapter 2 I address the three elements that determine its empirical structure: the research population, methodology and context.

The research is based on a research population of 284 deaf and 284 hearing men and women, all born between 1748 and 1860 in 123 municipalities in East Flanders. To trace prelingually deaf people living in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century East Flanders, I used a varied set of historical sources. More specifically, I made use of military conscription registers, individual bulletins, a list entitled *Staat van alle de stomme-dooven welke zig bevinden in de provincie Oost-Vlaanderen* (State of all the deaf-mutes located in East Flanders), the list of enrolment of the *Institut Royal des Sourdes-Muettes* (Royal Institute for Deaf-Mute girls) in Ghent, grant applications and population registers. In the first section of this chapter, I address each of these sources separately (2.1.1). From these sources, I selected all men and women who were ‘deaf and dumb’ and born in the province of East Flanders, reached at least sixteen years of age and for whom the place and date of birth are known. The life courses of the men and women selected were subsequently reconstructed from birth until death through linkage with parish and civil registers and population registers. In subsection 2.1.2, I evaluate the possibilities of life course methodology for historical disability research and discuss the sources used for life course reconstruction in more detail. For each deaf person, I chose one sibling of the same sex and with the smallest birth interval to the deaf individual as a control subject. The selection criteria and characteristics of the non-deaf research cohorts are discussed in subsection 2.1.3.

Section 2.2 outlines how the data from the sources was translated into variables suitable for different types of analysis (bivariate and multivariate) for the different thematic research questions (2.2.1). This research also supplemented the life course analysis with other sources, written from both a quantitative and a qualitative perspective. From a quantitative perspective, the individual-level data was compared with statistical data on an aggregate provincial and national level. Contemporary publications and



newspaper articles were used to qualitatively frame the research. The sources and adoption of this productive mix are discussed in subsection 2.2.2.

Life course analysis can be used to investigate the interaction between individual life courses (individual), demographic, socio-economic, institutional and cultural circumstances (contextual), and the interaction between the two (interactional). In the final section of this chapter (2.3), I discuss the contextual aspects, both with regard to space (the province of East Flanders) and time (the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries). I highlight the economic and demographic development of the region and its medical infrastructure in relation to the central hypothesis.

## **2.1 Research population**

The basis for this study is a life course analysis of a research population consisting of an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century birth cohort of deaf men and women. This research is unique in its set-up to scrutinize the life courses, from birth to death, of a large group of deaf people. Below I describe how I identified the deaf in historical sources and selected my research population (2.1.1). Subsequently, I discuss the vital registration data and population registers, which form the basis of the life course reconstruction of the research population (2.1.2). It is only by comparing the life courses of deaf people with non-deaf people that it is possible to discern the normality or particularity of the deaf lives. I chose the siblings of the deaf research individuals as a control group. The reasons for this choice and selection procedure are discussed in subsection 2.1.3.

### **2.1.1 Identifying the deaf in historical sources**

The most commonly used sources in the historical demographic study of population groups are civil records: birth, marriage and death certificates. Although these sources are often available from as early as the sixteenth century, they cannot be used for identifying people with a disability as impairments are not indicated. As the disabled themselves often had neither the means nor the opportunity to document their life stories, disability historians usually turn to records of institutions for the disabled.

Although these are of great value, the disabled people in these sources mainly appear as objects of medical surveillance, as recipients of charity or special education, or as

subjects of state disciplinary action. Historians are thus left to assess the experiences of people with disabilities through the filter of professionals.<sup>1</sup> An additional downside, from a life course perspective, is that institutional records only rarely contain enough personal information about their residents to allow them to be linked to civil registration, necessary for life course reconstruction.

The Belgian province of East Flanders, however, has several unique sources that can be used to identify deaf people from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards.<sup>2</sup> In the State Archive of Beveren, I found four types of sources in which the presence of a hearing impairment was mentioned: military conscription registers, provincial individual bulletins, a list entitled *Staat van alle de stomme-dooven welke zig bevinden in de provincie Oost-Vlaanderen* (State of all the deaf-mutes located in the province of East Flanders), and grant applications for the education of deaf children. The archive of the congregation of the *Zusters van Liefde van Jezus en Maria* (Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary) provided the admission list of the *Institut Royal des Sourdes-Muettes*, the first school for deaf girls established by the congregation in Ghent in 1820. The population registers of the population archive of Ghent were used to identify the male pupils of the *Institut Royal des Sourds-Muets* (Royal Institute for Deaf-Mute boys), founded in Ghent in 1825. These sources are discussed in more detail below.

### 2.1.1.1 Conscription registers

Conscription was originally a French recruitment system, introduced into the Belgian provinces in 1798 through the adoption of the Jourdan-Delbrel law. The law applied to all French people, as well as to all men living in the Belgian provinces, which had fallen into French hands in 1794.<sup>3</sup> The law stipulated compulsory military service for all men aged between 20 and 25. Every year five entry lists were drafted, one for each birth year (one for the 20-year-olds, one for the 21-year-olds, etc.). Initially the French government applied a selection procedure according to age, starting with the youngest cohort until the required number of recruits was obtained. In 1804 a ballot system was introduced to select the group of *conscrits* (conscripts) needed to complete the army quota.

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<sup>1</sup> Braddock, D.L. & Parish, S.L. (2001) "An Institutional History of Disability" In: Albrecht, G.L., Seelman, K.D. & Bury, M. (eds.) *Handbook of Disability Studies*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 11-68.

<sup>2</sup> The full references to the archival sources referred to throughout the book can be found in the bibliography at the end of this volume.

<sup>3</sup> Helin, E., De Gryse, P. et al. (1989) "De conscriptie" In: Zelck, F. (ed.) *De erfenis van de Franse Revolutie*. Brussels: ASLK, 200.

One of the regulations of the Jourdan-Delbrel law concerned the issue of exemption from military service. The law stated that men suffering from a range of acknowledged conditions could be exempted from military service temporarily, for example in the case of illness or injuries, or permanently, in the case of physical or mental impairments, on condition that their infirmity was certified by a physician. For that reason, the entry was always accompanied by a medical examination. Although unfit men were exempted, according to article 51, all men had to be listed: “*les demandes de dispense pour cause d’infirmité ou d’incapacité de service seront faites et jugées dans les formes qui seront établies par une loi particulière; mais ceux qui les formeront, devront toujours être compris dans les tableaux de la conscription militaire*” (applications for exemption because of an infirmity or the incapability of service will be conducted and judged in the manner established by a specific law; but those who file an application should always be included in the lists of military conscription).<sup>4</sup> As a result, conscription registers can be used for identifying men with an impairment – in this case for identifying deaf men. Because of the distinction made between temporary and permanent exemption, moreover, it is possible to distinguish between people who were temporarily deaf, as a result of an illness or accident – registered as “*sourd, exempté pour une année*” (deaf, exempted for one year) – and people who were born deaf or became deaf shortly after birth, resulting in an inability to hear and speak – “*sourd-muet, exempté définitive*” (deaf-mute, permanently exempted).

Several scholars have expressed reservations about the information on physical impairment in the registers. Historian Tom De Paepe summarizes the most important criticisms in his 2003 article. These relate to the quality of the medical information and to the medical examination itself. The medical data in the registers is often superficial, vague – a person could be exempted because of “*faiblesse*” (weakness) – and focused on external disabilities. The medical examination was carried out by physicians who were obliged to place their expertise at the disposal of the government. However, the final decision was in the hands of a recruitment board that was not medically trained. Not every board applied the same standards, so results could differ between the different regions. Sometimes the records were incomplete, which could also distort the outcome. According to the regulations, conscripts first had to be measured. All men shorter than 1.544 m were exempted immediately, without a medical examination. As a result, there is an under-representation of small men among the men rejected because of a physical impairment. De Paepe concludes with the frequently discussed problem of fraud: conscripts could fake or induce an ailment or could try to bribe civil officers. However, re-

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<sup>4</sup> De Paepe, T. (2003) *Oost-Vlaamse mannen met een handicap in de 19de eeuw. Een sociaal-demografisch onderzoek op basis van de conscriptieregisters*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished master’s dissertation).

search by A. Forrest and L. De Vos among others has indicated that both types of fraud had low success rates.<sup>5</sup>

This research is unlikely to suffer from such potential distortions. The impairment of interest, the inability to hear and speak (deaf-muteness), is easily identifiable and recordable. Pretending to be deaf-mute or self-mutilation in order to lose hearing and speech does not seem easily feasible. However, it is possible that due to the height requirements, a number of small deaf men (smaller than 1.544 m) eluded my search.

Overall, the benefits of the conscription registers outweigh the disadvantages. The registers are usually very well preserved and because of their continuity they are an ideal source for diachronic research. As the military conscription system remained largely unaltered under Dutch rule (1815-1830) and in nineteenth-century Belgium, the registers can be used to trace the names of deaf men throughout the nineteenth century. An important advantage for the representativeness of the research population is that all socio-economic strata and geographic areas are covered: all 20- to 25-year-old-men had to present themselves to the recruitment officers. As a result, the research group can be considered to be a balanced mix of low, middle and upper class men, comparable to society at large. Moreover, the data recorded in the conscription registers allow linkage with other sources. The records contain, if complete, the following information: names of the conscript and his parents, his date and place of birth, occupation, height and a description of the grounds for possible exemption. Based on this information, it is possible to connect a name from the conscription registers with the matching birth, marriage and death certificate in civil registration, as well as to a household within population registers.

Historical demographer Chris Vandenbroeke calculated that about 10 to 15 percent of the general population in the first half of the nineteenth century was exempted as a result of physical impairments (excluding the men of small stature).<sup>6</sup> Government statistics for the middle of the nineteenth century (1841-1850) mention exemption rates of 11

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<sup>5</sup> De Paepe, T. (2003) "Oost-Vlaamse mannen met een handicap: een sociaal-demografisch onderzoek en een levensloopanalyse op basis van de conscriptieregisters (1807-1809 en 1846)" *Handelingen der Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Ghent*, LVII, 194. For more on the conscription registers; Vandenbroeke, C. (1981) "De keurlingenlijsten als sociaal-demografische meter" *De Leiegouw*, 23, 235-73; De Vos, L. (1985) *Het effectief van de Belgische krijgsmacht en de militiewetgeving, 1830-1914*. Brussels: Koninklijk Legermuseum; Roosemont, F. (1987) "De waarde van militieregisters in het sociaal-demografisch onderzoek: Test-case de provincie Oost-Vlaanderen tijdens de eerste helft van de 19e eeuw" *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Militaire Geschiedenis*, 27, 257-98; Vandeplas, B. (2002) "Le problème de la conscription dans la première moitié du XIXe siècle" *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française*, 329, 16-40.

<sup>6</sup> Vandenbroeke, C. (1981) "De keurlingenlijsten", 271.

percent for the whole of Belgium and 13.2 percent for the province of East Flanders.<sup>7</sup> Based on De Paepe's estimates, in 1806 about 2.5 percent of Belgian men and 2.2 percent of East Flemish men were exempted from military service due to hearing disorders.<sup>8</sup> Using estimates made by F. Roosemont and A.J. Meynne, De Paepe calculates that in the middle of the nineteenth century (1851-1855) 1.2 percent of Belgian men and 1.1 percent of East Flemish men were declared unfit because they were deaf-mute.<sup>9</sup>

**Figure 2.1** Example of a military conscription register

1782	Deuk	Noteste	Verrebrack	commerc	Jaug & ann. post	
1783	Deuk	Jean Joseph	Beveren	domest	Jan & ann	Nels
1784	Roast, ray	Dominique	Doel	Journalier	Martin & man	anne Praes
1785	Roast	Jean	Beveren	culteur	Jean & ann de	Sourd
1786	Roast, ray	Jean Joseph	id	brapent	Jean & Jean de	accident au pied gauche
1787	Blommaert	Jean	Kieldrecht	griechent	Nan & helene	Clapen

Source: State Archives Beveren

To trace prelingually deaf men I consulted the conscription registers of the Scheldt department – later the province of East Flanders – which are preserved in the State Archive of Beveren. The conscription registers are bulky and going through them on an annual basis would have proved too time-consuming. Moreover, as the percentages above indicate, each year only a few of the hundreds of conscripts provided evidence of a prelingual hearing impairment. For practical reasons, I decided to take three random samples from the conscription registers. The completeness and quality of the registers as well as privacy legislation issues (2.1.1.6) played a role in the delineation of the samples. The three samples provided the names and personal information of 87 deaf-mute men who were born between 1782 and 1860.

<sup>7</sup> Ministère de l'Intérieur (1852) *Statistique générale de la Belgique: Exposé de la situation du Royaume (période décennale de 1841-1850)*. Brussels: Lesigne, 594-5.

<sup>8</sup> No distinction is made between temporary and permanent exemption. It is furthermore not clear whether the hearing impaired men were profoundly deaf, hard of hearing, lacking speech, etc.

<sup>9</sup> De Paepe, T. (2003) *Oost-Vlaamse mannen met een handicap in de 19de eeuw*.

The conscription registers of the French period (1803-1809) provided the names of 40 prelingually deaf men, all born between 1782 and 1789. In the first year of Dutch rule (1815), I found 139 men who were rejected because of deafness. In 18 cases it was clearly specified that the men were deaf-mute. The 18 men were born between 1785 and 1796.<sup>10</sup> The final sample was drawn from the conscription registers between 1860 and 1880.<sup>11</sup> Spread over this period, I found 29 deaf-mute men, born between 1840 and 1860.

### 2.1.1.2 Individual bulletins

In the nineteenth-century context of industrialization and urbanization, Belgian government statistics became increasingly influenced by social aspirations. The societal changes and uncertainties that resulted from socio-economic developments stimulated an increased need for information that could be used for supervision and social improvement. This need for social information prompted the governmental statistical apparatus to broaden its horizons: social, moral and intellectual characteristics of society, in addition to human and material resources, were included in statistical surveys.<sup>12</sup> As a result, provincial committees were engaged in the collection of a wide variety of information. At the request of the national government, they studied among others the local causes of crime, poverty and the most common causes of death, and counted different population groups such as the blind, 'insane' and the 'deaf and dumb'.<sup>13</sup>

The main incentive for counting these population groups, besides the government's aim to acquire information into "*den lichaems- en geestestoestand dier klasse van ongelukkigen*" (the bodily and mental condition of this class of unfortunates)<sup>14</sup>, was to assess their level of education and change education policy accordingly. This becomes evident from the general focus on the intellectual condition of the deaf and blind in the statistics. The interest in their education can probably be ascribed on the one hand to a general increase in the influence of schools in society, and on the other to the spread of the idea that deaf people were not necessarily 'dumb'. The general acceptance of this belief resulted in the development of deaf schools throughout Belgium and Europe. It is in this

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<sup>10</sup> It is not clear why six of these men were still in the conscription registers even though they were older than 25.

<sup>11</sup> For the following years: 1861 - 1862 - 1863 - 1864 - 1866 - 1869 - 1870 - 1872 - 1874 - 1876 - 1878 - 1880.

<sup>12</sup> Bracke, N. (2008) *Een monument voor het land*, 28-34.

<sup>13</sup> Bracke, N. (2008) *Een monument voor het land*, 229.

<sup>14</sup> De Jaegher "Gouvernement van Oost-Vlaanderen, 1e afdeling, Reg. A/32, N° 1270 Opneming der Doofstommen en Blinden op den 30 July 1858". RAG, Provincie Oost-Vlaanderen 1851-1870, fonds Weldadigheid, 'Statistieken van doofstommen en blinden'.

context of an increased statistical and educational interest in the deaf population that the individual bulletins were published.

In the provincial archive of East Flanders (1851-1870), I found the aggregated statistics of the deaf and blind population in East Flanders for the years 1858, 1866 and 1870. As the aggregated statistics do not contain information on an individual level, they cannot be used for identifying deaf men and women. Nevertheless, they can be very useful as reference points for the results of the life course analysis (see 2.2.2.1).

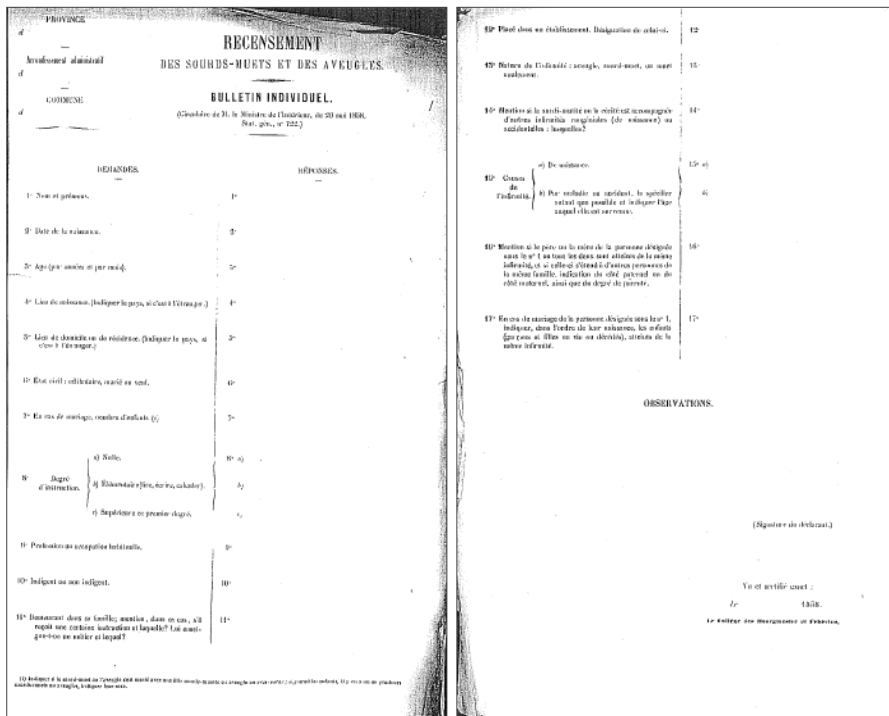
The statistical overview of 1858 came attached with the individual bulletins or personal dossiers of 137 deaf-mute and blind individuals (87 blind persons and 50 deaf-mute persons). Although the provincial government's aim was to draw up a file for *every* blind and deaf person in East Flanders, the small number of 137 files indicates that either files were lost or that not all deaf and blind individuals were recorded. A closer look at the composition of the individual bulletins shows that all the bulletins, except for seven files, refer to individuals institutionalized at the time of registration. As the questionnaires in the bulletins were not filled in by the deaf and blind themselves, but by constables, mayors and directors of institutions, it is not unlikely that many deaf and blind men and women, living in the anonymity of their own homes, were overlooked. For this reason, the source needs to be handled with caution. Of the deaf registrants, 70 percent were either underage and attending a deaf school or over 50 and residing in an institution for the elderly. As I will show later, neither the attendance of a deaf school, nor the move to a facility for the elderly seems to have been dependent on social class, implying that a wide range of people were institutionalized to some extent during their lives. The institutional bias of the bulletins can therefore be considered acceptable, which justifies the usage of this source for the identification of deaf individuals.

An individual bulletin consisted of a list of 17 questions relating to different aspects of the disabled person's life. Besides the name, date and place of birth and residence, questions also assessed marital status, number of children, level of education and occupation, as well as level of indigence. With regard to a person's disability, it was recorded whether an individual resided in an institution, how and at what age the disability was acquired, whether the deafness or blindness was accompanied by other diseases and finally, whether the person had relatives who were also disabled in some way. The extensive nature of the individual bulletins makes them particularly valuable for research. Much of the information that is recorded in the dossiers cannot be found in other historical sources. Moreover, the detailed personal information enables reliable linkage between the bulletins and the sources used for life course reconstruction.

The 50 deaf persons recorded in these bulletins were all born between 1794 and 1854. Of these, 35 were male and 15 female. 21 men and women were born in an urban municipality, and 31 men and women were living in a city at the time of registration. As most

institutions were located in urban environments, these ratios were not uncommon. The bulletins of 10 men and women indicated that they were not indigent. The other 40 were labelled indigent. However, it is not clear what criteria were used to assess indigence.

**Figure 2.2** Blank individual bulletin (front and back)



Source: State Archives Beveren

### 2.1.1.3 “Staat van alle de stomme-dooven welke zig bevinden in de provincie Oost-Vlaanderen”

In the Fund of Benevolence archive of the Dutch Period (1815-1830), I came across a folder entitled *Over doofstommen* (regarding deaf-mutes). The folder consists mainly of the correspondence between the parents of deaf children and the director of the schools for deaf girls and deaf boys in Ghent, founded respectively in 1820 and 1825. Most of the letters only mentioned the name of the deaf child, providing too little information to match the names to civil registration. However, among the letters I found a list entitled *Staat van alle de stomme-dooven welke zig bevinden in de provincie Oost-Vlaanderen* (State of all the deaf-mutes located in the province of East Flanders). The list contains the names of 210 individuals, 124 deaf men and 86 deaf women, whose ages range from 4 to 73. They resided in 115 different municipalities in the province of East Flanders, with 38 of them living in an urban setting (18 percent). The list consists of seven columns of information (see figure 2.3): their residence at the time of registration, their name and surname, their age, their “*gesteltenis of die hunner ouders of familie*” (state of being or that



of their parents or family), whether they were “*behoefstig, wie voorziet in hun onderhoud en welke zijn hunne verdere middelen van bestaen*” (indigent, who provides in their maintenance and what are their means of existence), and “*aanmerkingen*” (considerations).

The person who drew up the list seems to have acted arbitrarily as the information in the last three columns lacks all consistency. Notes in the column regarding their state of being vary greatly. A person could be described as “poor”, “orphan”, “lives with his parents”, “has some possessions”, “day labourer” or “his mother is a widow”. In the column addressing a person’s indigence, the information relates mainly, but not exclusively, to the deaf person’s maintenance. In many cases, the list simply states that a person “lives with his parents, who oversee his maintenance”. Others are “supported by the office of benevolence”, “provide for themselves in their maintenance” or are living with other family members who take care of them. In a few cases, a person was described as a “servant” or simply “not to the burden of a public institution”. The final column was mostly left blank. When filled in, the remarks mainly relate to the deafness and health of the person. Sometimes it indicates that a person became deaf as a child as a result of an illness or injury, or that he or she has other impairments besides being deaf. Some individuals are described as “healthy and robust” or “very wise and of miraculous understanding”.

**Figure 2.3** *Staat van alle de stomme-dooven welke zig bevinden in de provincie Oost-Vlaanderen*

Naam der Gemeenten.	Naamen.	Voornaemen.	Quaden.	Naam der Betreftende of der Familie.	Zijn zij behoeftig	Aanmerkingen.
<i>Heden</i>	<i>Konink-Borghes</i>	<i>Antonius</i>	<i>11 jenn</i>	<i>In staat van behoeftigheid...</i>	<i>De wetter tijt wester in hem...</i>	
	<i>Kinder Bied</i>	<i>Abel Jovanet</i>	<i>11 jenn</i>	<i>De wetter tijt wester in hem...</i>	<i>De wetter tijt wester in hem...</i>	
	<i>Kolant</i>	<i>Keter</i>	<i>19 jenn</i>	<i>De wetter tijt wester in hem...</i>	<i>De wetter tijt wester in hem...</i>	
<i>Istet</i>	<i>Laend</i>	<i>Maris Jovanet</i>	<i>16 jenn</i>	<i>De wetter tijt wester in hem...</i>	<i>De wetter tijt wester in hem...</i>	
	<i>Eghede</i>	<i>Franciscus</i>	<i>7 jenn</i>	<i>De wetter tijt wester in hem...</i>	<i>De wetter tijt wester in hem...</i>	
	<i>Ponconle</i>	<i>Ponconle</i>	<i>16 jenn</i>	<i>De wetter tijt wester in hem...</i>	<i>De wetter tijt wester in hem...</i>	
<i>Aulwarde</i>						
<i>Deyse</i>	<i>Pand-Konink-Borghes</i>	<i>Jovanet</i>	<i>29 jenn</i>	<i>De wetter tijt wester in hem...</i>	<i>De wetter tijt wester in hem...</i>	
	<i>Kobem</i>	<i>Keter</i>	<i>15 jenn</i>	<i>De wetter tijt wester in hem...</i>	<i>De wetter tijt wester in hem...</i>	
	<i>Konink-Borghes</i>	<i>Antonius Jovanet</i>	<i>16 jenn</i>	<i>De wetter tijt wester in hem...</i>	<i>De wetter tijt wester in hem...</i>	
<i>Cestor</i>	<i>Konink-Borghes</i>	<i>Antonius</i>	<i>15 jenn</i>	<i>De wetter tijt wester in hem...</i>	<i>De wetter tijt wester in hem...</i>	
	<i>Konink-Borghes</i>	<i>Jovanet</i>	<i>7 jenn</i>	<i>De wetter tijt wester in hem...</i>	<i>De wetter tijt wester in hem...</i>	
	<i>Cesce</i>	<i>Philippus</i>	<i>11 jenn</i>	<i>De wetter tijt wester in hem...</i>	<i>De wetter tijt wester in hem...</i>	
<i>Gent</i>	<i>Higgenche</i>	<i>Antonius</i>	<i>21 jenn</i>	<i>De wetter tijt wester in hem...</i>	<i>De wetter tijt wester in hem...</i>	
	<i>Cesce</i>	<i>Franciscus</i>	<i>11 jenn</i>	<i>De wetter tijt wester in hem...</i>	<i>De wetter tijt wester in hem...</i>	

Source: State Archives Beveren

The use of this list for life course reconstruction purposes was challenging. Neither the motives behind the origin of the source nor its initiator are recorded. The list does not mention the date it was drafted, but based on the other files in the archival folder, the source was dated to the early 1820s. This date was later refined to 1821 by comparing the list against dates of birth in parish and civil registration. I expected to lose a considerable group of individuals from the list in the life course reconstruction as only the place of residence at the time of registration was recorded. Individuals could have moved before and after registration, which would have hindered the tracing of the birth, marriage and death certificates. Moreover, due to the absence of the date of birth (only the age at the time of registration is available) and the frequent occurrence of the same names in the nineteenth century, especially first names, I anticipated difficulties in linking individuals from the list to civil registration certificates.

Despite its drawbacks, the importance of the list cannot be overestimated. Based on the list, it is possible to trace deaf men and women born as early as 1748. According to the earliest census of deaf persons available, 1 out of 2198 inhabitants in East Flanders in 1835 was deaf-mute. Based on the population size of East Flanders at that time, this ratio implies that there were around 327 deaf-mute people in the province.<sup>15</sup> There is no reason to assume that the number of deaf-mute people in 1821 was much different. This implies that the list covers about two-thirds of the deaf population in the province.

#### **2.1.1.4 List of enrolment of the Institut Royal des Sourdes-Muettes in Ghent**

As the sources above seemed to favour the identification of male deaf individuals, attempts were made to expand the research group of deaf women. Initially I turned to passports issued for movement within the country, which were instituted during the French period until the late 1840s. These records contain information about the name, profession, place of birth, residence and physical appearance of people travelling within the country. The hope was to find records of deafness in the descriptions of the travellers. However, the passports provided no names of deaf women – or men. The female deficit was ultimately overcome by using the admission list of the *Institut Royal des Sourdes-Muettes*, established in Ghent in 1820 by Father Josef Triest, founder of the catholic congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary. Inspired by the French *Institut National pour Sourds-Muets* in Paris and concerned with the fate of deaf children, Triest sent one of his novices to Paris to learn about the education and communication

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<sup>15</sup> Ministère de l'Intérieur (1864) *Statistique générale de la Belgique: Exposé de la situation du Royaume (période décennale de 1851-1860)*. Brussels: Lesigne, v.1, 73; Montigny, L.J.F. (1835) *Annuaire de la province de la Flandre-Orientale*. Ghent: Vanderhaeghe-Maya, 84. Montigny states that in 1835 East Flanders had 745,197 inhabitants.

methods of the French institute. In 1820 the first Belgian school for deaf girls opened its doors.<sup>16</sup>

From the start the school administration kept a list of all pupils attending the school, which can be accessed in the archive of the congregation (figure 2.3).<sup>17</sup> From 1820 to 1870 the register contains information on the names of 167 deaf girls, as well as their parents, their date and place of birth, the date of starting and finishing school, as well as information on the payment of the annual school fee. The girls were all born between 1803 and 1865 and originated from 81 different municipalities.

The admission list was enriched by copies of over a thousand letters written by Triest, in his position as director of the institute (1810-1836), and of a more limited correspondence of the school administration in the second half of the nineteenth century. The letters are addressed to parents, merchants, municipalities and officials at various levels. The topics range from letters that communicate the acceptance or rejection of a girl's application to the school to the purchase of school supplies. Triest wrote letters to acquire funding for less fortunate girls and to inform parents of the death of their daughter. As these letters have been digitized by the congregation, they are easily accessible.

**Figure 2.4** List of enrolment of the *Institut Royal des Sourdes-Muettes*, Ghent

NOMEN	NOMEN DER OUDERS	DOORZAAK DER DOOPHEID	Geboorte plaats	Geboorte Dage	Introductie	Eerste prijs	Plooiing	Verzend	Beilage	Overlijten	AANMERKINGEN
167. Maria Lidonia W. Haerboer	Sely Sophia Bekechop		18 Aug 1809	20 Feb 1811		2 Mei 1815	2 Mei 1815		27 Juli 1817		Studeert in Gen. Sint H.
168. Maria Arnolda Smulders	Joan. Cornelius Wilhelmina Janssen		18 Aug 1809	25 April 1811						21 April 1815 aan Paus Pauze van aan de voet Sint	St. Gudov 1817
169. Therisia de Nulder	H. de Marie Janssens		18 Aug 1809	23 Mei 1811		1 April 1811	17 Juli 1811		24 Aug 1813	14 Augustus 1813 aan Sint Simp.	Studeert in Gen. Sint H.
170. Josephina Antonia Van Duyn	Peter Antonius Katerina de Nulder		18 Aug 1809	28 Mei 1811		24 April 1811	29 Mei 1811		31 Juli 1817		Studeert in Gen. Sint H.

Source: Beelaert, B., Bruyneel, C. & Leeman, K. (2009) *Vive la parole? Milaan 1880 als scharniermoment in het doveonderwijs*. Gent: Fevlado-Diversus, 68-9.

<sup>16</sup> Buyens, M. (2005) *De dove persoon, zijn gebarentaal en het doveonderwijs*. Antwerp: Garant.

<sup>17</sup> For more information: <<http://www.archief-museum.zvl.org/>>

Based on the enrolment list and letters, we can reconstruct the criteria girls had to meet to be accepted into the school. Assessing the profile of the pupils provides a distinct insight into the composition of the research population. First of all, a girl had to be deaf-mute. Girls that were hard of hearing or could speak were rejected. In December 1821, Triest sent a child back to her mother because, as he informs her in an accompanying letter, the child is “not deaf and dumb, but hard of hearing, and has even the ability to speak”.<sup>18</sup> Second, they had to be aged between 10 and 18 at admission. In 1830 the priest of Oirschot wrote a letter to Triest to request the admission of three deaf children, who were 17, 10 and 6 years old. In his reply to the priest, Triest stated that the oldest girls would be allowed to attend the school, but the youngest was too young to benefit from instruction. The 17-year-old was accepted, but on a provisional basis until it was proven that she was not too old to learn. In a letter to an unspecified magistrate in January 1830, Triest rejected a 25-year-old woman for instruction as it contravened regulations and, he continued, from experience he knew that a person of such an age was “incapable of learning, which would render all investment fruitless”.<sup>19</sup> While the upper limit was applied quite strictly, in the course of the nineteenth century the school started admitting much younger pupils, some as young as 5. Nonetheless, the pupils who entered the school between 1820 and 1870 were on average 10.3 years old (median 9.9 years old). Third, admission to the school required the payment of an annual tuition fee, which rose from 120 Dutch guilders in 1820 to around 400 Belgian francs in 1870. In the correspondence of Triest, many letters were addressed to parents, benefactors, municipalities and offices of benevolence in order to obtain payments for pupils. Information on the annual school fee in the admission list indicates that the families of most pupils could not pay the tuition fee themselves. Out of the 163 girls who attended the school between 1820 and 1870, the parents of only 6 girls paid the whole tuition fee by themselves. A comparison of the tuition fee with contemporary wage estimates suggests that only the happy few could afford the payment.<sup>20</sup> However, the financial intervention of a provincial or communal government, charities or benefactors meant that girls of lower social classes were able to attend the school as well. According to the local government act of 1836, municipalities had to mediate in the expenses for the care and maintenance of the deaf, blind and insane, among others. When the resources of the municipality were limited, the town council could make an appeal to the province or state. However,

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<sup>18</sup> Triest, P.J. (1821) *Brief 717*. Ghent: Archive of the Sisters of Charity.

<sup>19</sup> Triest, P.J. (1830) *Brief 1290*. Ghent: Archive of the Sisters of Charity.

<sup>20</sup> By way of example: in 1871 an unschooled mason in Brussels earned around 0.20 Belgian francs per hour (Scholliers, P. (2012) *Grafieken, kaarten, bibliografie, artikelenlijst & URL's*. <<http://www.vub.ac.be/SGES/scholliers1.html>>, consulted on 14/01/2014. Raising the money for the tuition fee for the *Institut des Sourdes-Muettes* would have taken him 2000 working hours.

“many municipalities, low in resources, and more willing to spend their funds on expenses of more general importance and of greater urgency, continued to disregard deaf-mute children”.<sup>21</sup> In 1876 a law was adopted that compelled provinces to establish a *Fonds Commun*, a communal fund to which municipalities had to contribute according to their population size. This fund had to bear 75 percent of the expenses for the care and education of the poor, insane, deaf and blind. The remaining 25 percent was the responsibility of the municipality. In 1891 and 1896 the law was amended so that 50 percent of the expenses were paid by the communal fund. The province was charged with 12.5 percent, the state with 37.5 percent. The mediation of these different institutions enabled the admission of lower class girls to the school. In fact, the school was especially aimed at the education of indigent girls. This is confirmed by a letter written by the school board to an inspector in 1881.<sup>22</sup> In the letter, the school board addresses the importance of housing the pupils for various reasons, including physical factors as “the deaf-mutes mainly originate from the indigent classes and live in generally miserable physical conditions.”<sup>23</sup> Finally, girls of the proper age and with the means to fund their education had to provide three documents on arrival at the school. A pupil had to have a doctor’s certificate stating she was in good health and had the intellectual ability to be educated, and a copy of her birth certificate and baptism certificate.<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, I have not found these documents in the archive.

Once admitted, the education in the institution took about 6 to 8 years to complete. However, pupils were free to stay longer and reside in the adjoining convent to help with household chores<sup>25</sup> – as 31 of the 163 girls did. Others left the school, in most cases to return to the home of their parents. Girls left the school at an average age of 18.3 (median 18) after an education lasting 7.9 years on average (median 8.6 years). In some cases, instruction ended more abruptly. Some girls, according to the entry list, left the school early because they were “*onbekwaam onderwijs te genieten*” (unable to enjoy education), or “*onnozel*” (idiotic). For example, Marie Francisca De Poorter, a 7-year-old girl, was sent to a lunatic asylum in October 1869 after only two weeks at the institution.

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<sup>21</sup> (1912, 1913) “De eerste doofstommenschool in België” *Caritas*. Ghent: Archive Sisters of Charity; Dewaele, F. (1980) *De krankzinnigenzorg te Gent vanaf het einde van de 18<sup>de</sup> eeuw tot 1870*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished master’s dissertation), 70.

<sup>22</sup> Although the school was a private institution, it was supervised by the state. The supervision consisted of a regular inspection by an inspector of the Offices of Benevolence and by inspectors of the primary education system. Ministère de l’intérieur (1912?) *Statistique générale de la Belgique: Exposé de la situation du Royaume de 1876 à 1900*. Brussels: Piquaert.

<sup>23</sup> “Brief aan de inspecteur betreffende het onderricht van de doofstomme meisjes”. Fund *De Doofstommeninstelling*. Ghent: Archive of the Sisters of Charity.

<sup>24</sup> Triest, P.J. (1826) *Brief 1036*. Ghent: Archive of the Sisters of Charity.

<sup>25</sup> Triest, P.J. (1829) *Brief 1253*. Ghent: Archive of the Sisters of Charity.

In contrast to many institutional sources that have limited personal information, the entry list's richness enabled a straightforward linkage with civil records. The date and place of birth, as well as the names of the parents, were known and could be verified in birth, marriage and death certificates. Questions may arise with regard to the representativeness of this group of girls for deaf women in general. By choosing to select deaf women in an educational setting, a considerable group of uneducated women is not taken into account. Based on the *Exposé de la situation de Royaume (1851-1860)*, which indicates the numbers of deaf men and women that had no or a basic or higher education, it is estimated that in 1858 about 49 percent of East Flemish deaf women were educated.<sup>26</sup> The numbers in the *Exposé* are aggregated and do not take age differences into account. It can thus be assumed that the percentages of uneducated women were elevated by the presence of older women in the population, who were born before the introduction of deaf schools (but were still alive in 1858). In this case, the percentage of educated girls and younger women was probably higher, making the selection of deaf girls in the admission list more representative.

In contrast to initial expectations, the bias of the focus on educated women does not result in an over-representation of children from the upper classes. As the enrolment list and letters made clear, most of the deaf girls that entered the institution originated from lower class families. Well-off girls were probably more likely to be home-tutored. Moreover, a letter written by the provincial executive of East Flanders in 1825 indicates that the main goal of the institution was to provide a proper education for poor deaf children, as it was “the only way to prevent them from being always dependent on poor relief funds, and on the contrary enable them to provide for their livelihood themselves”.<sup>27</sup> As a result, the sample is presumably not a faithful reflection of the female deaf population in general. Nonetheless, although the lives of a more exceptional group of upper class children escaped the search, the source enables a bottom-up view of the lives of the vast majority of the female deaf population.

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<sup>26</sup> Ministère de l'Intérieur (1864) *Statistique générale de la Belgique: exposé de la situation du Royaume (période décennale de 1851-1860)*. Brussels: Lesigne, v.1. Ratios for the men were slightly lower with percentages of respectively 44.3 and 45.8 percent. In 1858 the Flemish population consisted of 524 deaf women and 689 deaf men – 146 of those women and 212 of the men lived in East Flanders. The vast majority of the educated men and women had enjoyed an “*élémentaire*” (basic) education.

<sup>27</sup> “Correspondentie met de vorst inzake de vergoeding van het pensioaat van armlastige doofstommen, brief vanuit de provinciale staten naar de bureaus van weldadigheid”, Fund *De Doofstommeninstelling*, Ghent: Archive of the Sisters of Charity.

### 2.1.1.5 Institut Royal des Sourds-Muets based on grant applications and population registers

In 1825 Josef Triest and his congregation of the *Broeders van Liefde* (Brothers of Charity) founded a school for deaf boys in Ghent, as a counterpart to the school for deaf girls. Unfortunately, the admission list of the school for deaf boys was not preserved in the archive of the congregation. Despite this setback, I was able to reconstruct part of the student population by the creative use of two sources.

In the State Archive of Beveren, there were documents concerning a fund in the province of East Flanders for the period 1830-1850, where I found a folder entitled *Blinden en doofstommen* (blind people and deaf-mutes). It consisted of several documents relating to the deaf and blind population of East Flanders in this period. The folder contained two main types of documents: statistics on the number of deaf and blind men and women in several East Flemish municipalities from 1839 to 1845, and dossiers related to the application and awarding of grants for educational purposes. The first type contained only aggregated information, the second only mentioned the names and places of birth of the children and the sums that were appropriated – too little information to begin a life course reconstruction. However, among the documents I also found a list of *doofstommen in de instelling van Gent* (deaf-mutes in the institution of Ghent). The list mentioned the names of boys and girls, resident in East Flanders, who were residing in the schools for deaf boys and girls in Ghent. All the girls in this list were also found in the admission list of the *Institut Royal des Sourdes-Muettes*. For the 36 boys in the list, it provided the date, place and year of birth, information about their parents (names and/or occupations) and the date on which they were institutionalized. In about half the cases, information regarding the payment of the enrolment fee was recorded. As the dates of enrolment are between 1836 and 1850, it can be assumed that the list was kept fairly up to date. Three of the boys were previously identified in the individual bulletins. The 33 others in the list were born between 1821 and 1843, in 27 different municipalities.

Secondly, I turned to population registers (figure 2.5). Population registers became mandatory from 1846 in all Belgian municipalities and comprise a ten-yearly listing of all households living in a village, according to their address. Institutions are considered as households in these registers, and contain the names of all the residents living at the address of the institution. From its establishment to 1862, the *Institut Royal des Sourds-Muets* was located in Bijloke. Because of lack of space, the school moved to Appelstraat in 1862.<sup>28</sup> Based on this residential information, the population registers of Ghent could be used to trace deaf boys residing in the institute. In the registry office of Ghent, the

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<sup>28</sup> Buyens, M. (2005) *De dove persoon, zijn Gebarentaal en het dovenonderwijs*, 108-9.

population registers for the periods 1847-1856, 1857-1866 and 1867-1880 were consulted. In the period 1847-1856, 40 deaf boys were registered in Bijlokestraat together with their names, and year and place of birth. It appears that the age regulations in the boys' institute were observed less strictly as 15 students were over 18 years old – the oldest student of the institute was Joseph Jacques Van Haerde, who was 45. On average, the boys were 17.4 years old (median 15.5) at the time of registration in the population register. In the period 1857-1866, the student population rose to 79 pupils, of whom 10 died within the ten-year period. There was a considerable overlap of boys who remained in the institution over the two periods: 16 of the pupils in 1847-1856 were still in the institution in 1857-1866. While the status of “pupil” was clearly indicated in the population registers until 1867, in the subsequent register of the period 1867-1880 – the school was then located in Appelstraat – it was difficult to discern pupils from resident staff and employees as they were mixed up in the register. As it was not indicated whether a person was deaf-mute, this register was put aside.

Many of the boys in the population register were also listed in the *doofstommen in de instelling van Gent*, the individual bulletins or the conscription registers. Excluding the names of these men, the population registers provided the names of 50 more prelingually deaf men, all born between 1811 and 1849.

**Figure 2.5** Population register, Bijloke Ghent (1847-1856)

NUMMERS	NAMEN.	VOORNAMEN.	BEROEP OF STAAT	GEBOORTEPLAATS.	DAGTEREKENING OF GEBOORTE OF *****	BURGERLIJKE STAAT.	...
44	Van Haerde	Joseph Jacques	* leerling Gestigt Der Doofstommen	hoo	1802	...	...
45	Berlets	Joseph	...	...	...	...	...
46	Levaux	Nicolas	...	...	...	...	...
47	De Haenraet	Charles	...	...	...	...	...
48	De Wuyt	Antoine	...	...	...	...	...
49	Barbaux	Thomas	...	...	...	...	...
50	De Kuntze	Bernardus	...	...	...	...	...
51	De Hove	Dolphus	...	...	...	...	...
52	Shiel	Thomas	...	...	...	...	...
53	Verme	Jean Joseph	...	...	...	...	...
54	De Niend	Samuel	...	...	...	...	...
55	Suinaut	Constantinus	...	...	...	...	...
56	Hendebaut	Jean Joseph	...	...	...	...	...
57	De Clerq	Fredricus	...	...	...	...	...
58	De Hout	Joseph	...	...	...	...	...
59	De Wuyt	Antoine	...	...	...	...	...
60	De Wuyt	Antoine	...	...	...	...	...

Source: Registry office of Ghent

Notes: \* “leerling Gestigt Der Doofstommen” (pupil Institute for Deaf-mutes)



### 2.1.1.6 Selection criteria

On the basis of these sources, I collected the names of 340 deaf men and 268 deaf women, all born between 1748 and 1865. Reconstructing the life courses of such a sizeable research population, together with a non-deaf control group, was beyond the scope of this project. Starting from the main hypothesis and research design, I applied a set of five criteria to include or exclude individuals from the definitive research population.

The first criterion relates to the aim of this research to uncover changes in the living conditions of the deaf in the course of the nineteenth century. To that end, it was crucial to delineate at least two generations or *birth cohorts* that were comparable.

I made a first delineation based on dates when going through the conscription registers and enrolment list. According to Belgian privacy legislation, civil registration acts less than a hundred years cannot be consulted without the permission of the Court of First Instance. Although permission is granted quite readily for research purposes, one needs to be very cautious when presenting the personal data of people who have died within the last 100 years. To avoid such difficulties, I examined the conscription registers up to 1880 (final birth year of the conscripts was 1860), and the enrolment list at the school up to 1870 (final birth year of the girls was 1865). The main hypothesis assumes that the most important changes for people with disabilities occurred in the course of the nineteenth century. Based on the life course expectancy, some of the individuals selected in the conscription registers and enrolment list would live on into the 1940s. That is why it seemed appropriate to stop the search in 1880 and 1870 respectively.

The aim to go as far back in time as possible, as well as to extend my research well into the nineteenth century, brought about the demarcation of a birth cohort of deaf men and women born between the earliest birth year recorded (1748) and 1810, and a birth cohort of deaf men and women born between 1830 and 1860. The distinction between the two birth cohorts is parallel to that of the timing of industrialization in the region and can be regarded as dividing the research population into a pre-industrial and industrial cohort. In the discussion of the research context (2.3), I argue how individuals belonging to the two cohorts were faced with different living and working conditions in a steadily changing region.

Secondly, in order to avoid cases of mistaken identity, the date and place of birth of a person had to be known. This way, I could be confident of finding the right birth certificate, which was the starting point for further life course reconstruction. The conscription registers, individual bulletins and lists of deaf pupils recorded the date and place of birth. The *Staat van alle de stomme-dooven*, however, only provided a person's age and residence at the time of registration. The list is of too great a value, however, to be simply dismissed. To extract useable names from the list, I followed a procedure of linkage. Based on the age recorded and the presumable date the list was drawn up, I calculated a

target date of birth for each person. Subsequently, I tried to trace a birth certificate for every person on the list in the State Archive of Beveren.<sup>29</sup> I searched for the certificate in the municipality in which the person lived in 1821, as this was the only residential information available. In many cases I did not find the birth certificate, most likely because the person had left their place of birth and lived in a different municipality in 1821. When there were several candidates for one name – this could be the case in cities with large population sizes – and the list provided useful additional information, I engaged in a small-scale life course reconstruction. For example, the list may have indicated that a deaf person lived with his widowed mother. In that case, the father had died before 1821. By tracing the death certificates of the fathers of the different candidates, I tried to ascertain which person was most likely to be the deaf man or woman of interest.<sup>30</sup> Only when I was confident that the birth certificate concerned the person in question, was he or she added to the research population.

The final three criteria are partly chosen, but also the result of the characteristics of the sources. To assess the impact of a hearing impairment to the fullest, I selected only the men and women who were deaf from or shortly after birth (and thus also mute). In the *Staat van alle de stomme-dooven* and the enrolment lists of the deaf schools, this was automatically the case. In the conscription registers, I only selected those men who were permanently excluded because they were deaf-mute. In the individual bulletins, the answer to the fifteenth question regarding the origin of the impairment had to be “*de naissance*” (from birth). Individuals for whom, in addition to their deafness, another impairment was recorded – for example the girls who were expelled from the deaf school because of idiocy – were omitted as they would have complicated the interpretation of the results.<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, the sources used favour men and women who survived childhood. All the men in the conscription registers were at least 20 years old. The average age in the individual bulletins was 25.8 (median 18.4), 24.4 years (median 22) in the *Staat van alle de stomme-dooven*. The pupils of the deaf schools were generally younger (on average between 10 and 16 years old), but this source excludes deaf children who died before they were able to attend the school. For this reason, one criterion was that all research individuals had to live to at least to the age of 16.

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<sup>29</sup> The National Archive of Beveren preserves all parish and civil registration from their inception to 1870, for all East Flemish municipalities.

<sup>30</sup> “Most likely” as it was still possible that a person with the same name had also lost his father before 1821.

<sup>31</sup> A person with multiple disabilities probably encountered different obstacles in life, which affected his or her life course in a different way.

Finally, all research individuals had to be born in a municipality belonging to the province of East Flanders. Research individuals could move outside East Flanders during their life course, but they were all born in the province. In the conscription registers, individual bulletins and *Staat van alle de stomme-dooven* this was almost exclusively so. As the *Institut Royal des Sourdes-Muettes* and the *Institut Royal des Sourds-Muets* were the first deaf schools in Flanders, they also attracted pupils from outside the province. Nevertheless, the majority of the girls and boys originated from an East Flemish locality and qualified for selection.

On the basis of these criteria, I assembled a research population of 399 deaf men and women, born in the period 1748-1810 or 1830-1860. Table 2.1 gives a descriptive overview of the number of deaf men and women according to birth cohort and source.

**Table 2.1** Descriptive overview of the initial dataset according to source, in N

	Deaf research population			
	Born 1748-1810		Born 1830-1860	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
<b>N=</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>88</b>
Conscription registers	58	-	28	-
Individual bulletins	3	2	25	4
“State of all the deaf-mutes”	62	72	-	-
Institut Royal des Sourdes-Muettes	-	3	-	84
Institut Royal des Sourds-Muets	-	-	58	-

### 2.1.2 Reconstructing deaf lives

Our knowledge of the demographic behaviour of past societies has been mainly based on the methods of family reconstruction and sociology of the family. Both methods have dominated historical demography since the 1950s, primarily due to English and French initiatives.<sup>32</sup> Both approaches are *family-cycle* typologies, based on the stages in the history of a married couple. In that sense, they tend to emphasize the characteristics of the male and female heads of a household and largely ignore the experiences of those individuals who were not part of a traditional household, such as single people and unmarried mothers, and those who did not head their own households, such as the residents of an institution. The life course approach, in contrast, studies all individuals, including

<sup>32</sup> E.g. Gautier, E. & Henry, L. (1958) *La population de Crulai, paroisse Normande. Etude historique*. Paris: PUF; Laslett, P. & Wall, R. (1972) *Household and Family in Past Time*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

those who are excluded from the family life cycle paradigm. However, this does not imply that the importance of the family is ignored. The life course approach, in contrast to the household-centred approach, views the family *from the inside out* and follows individuals *within* families.<sup>33</sup> By the end of the 1980s, life course analysis was attracting increasing interest from scholars as the family life cycle was by then considered to be ahistoric and static. In the last decade, life course analysis has experienced a surge within historical research.

Within the field of disability history, however, the life course approach is largely uncharted territory. Nonetheless, the methodology offers interesting opportunities for historical disability research. In the next sections, I explore the possibilities of the life course methodology for this research, followed by a discussion of the sources enabling a life course reconstruction.

### 2.1.2.1 Life course analysis

In life course analysis, the life course is studied as a “*sequence of positions that a person occupies in time*”. Here *position* refers to important life events such as birth, marriage, parenthood, employment and death. Individual changes in these positions or *transitions* form the basis of the life cycle study. Every life course is characterized by a certain sequence and combination of these transitions.<sup>34</sup> By studying the life courses of larger groups of people, or *cohorts*, it becomes possible to distinguish patterns and produce “*standardized biographies*”.<sup>35</sup> This type of analysis thus enables us to gain insight into the average life course of a deaf man or woman from a certain time and place – as well as examine why certain individuals followed a different course.

The life course approach is built around five principles. First, individuals and cohorts are heavily influenced by the specific context (*time*) and location (*place*) in which they live. Insight into this living environment is thus required to understand the ways in which life courses were shaped. Second, people do not live in isolation but are *linked* with the lives of other people, groups and institutions. Third, every person makes their own choices and pursues certain goals that shape the life trajectory (*human agency*). These goals are the most difficult to ascertain in historical research, as sources that

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<sup>33</sup> Alter, G. (1988) *Family and the Female Life Course. The Women of Verviers, Belgium, 1849-1880*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 196.

<sup>34</sup> Kok, J. (2000) “Transities en trajecten. De levensloopbenadering in de sociale geschiedenis” *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis*, 3, 310-1.

<sup>35</sup> Kok, J. (2007) “Principles and Prospects of the Life Course Paradigm” *Annales de Démographie Historique*, 1, 203.

document personal feelings and thoughts are very rare. Fourth, previous experiences in life have an influence on the continuation of a person's life (*life-span development*). When studying cohorts it is assumed that the same experiences lead to similar decisions. A different background and other influencing factors result in different life courses. And fifth, the life course consists of events that occur with a certain *frequency* and *timing*. In this, timing has three dimensions: an event happens at a certain phase in the life of an individual (*individual time*), but it is also connected to a broader social timing (*family time*) and historical context (*historical time*).<sup>36</sup> Life course analysis aspires to be a holistic approach that illuminates the behaviour of individuals within their personal networks, specific locations, time and historical society.

Contemporary theorizing about disability has tended to emphasize the collective experiences of disabled people, and regard them as an oppressed group in society. It is hazardous, however, to oversimplify a collective experience, since disabling societies can affect people in different ways.<sup>37</sup> The disability experience may be markedly different for men and women, for people from rural and urban provenance, and in different stages of life. In this context, a life course approach of a varied cohort of people over a long period of time can be a useful tool. The life cycle analysis not only shows how people are affected by their environment, but also how they themselves contribute to changes within the environment. In the life course approach, a person is considered as continuously evolving in a dynamic social context within a changing socio-historical environment. Individuals are thus perceived as active agents who make decisions that affect their future development.<sup>38</sup> The tension between the uniqueness of individual behaviour and experiences on the one hand and general social patterns on the other is central to the life course paradigm and enables a differentiated perspective on the life courses of the deaf.

Life course analysis distinguishes itself from the methods of family reconstruction and sociology of the family in the importance it attaches to timing and the succession of events. The duration between the different events, or the duration of a transition (for example, time until marriage, time between successive childbirths, time until death) lies at the basis of the event history analysis (EHA), the statistical analysis on which most life course analyses are based. The EHA is a multivariate technique that makes it possible to determine which variable is the most decisive factor in a given transition. There-

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<sup>36</sup> Kok, J. (2007) "Principles and Prospects", 203-30.

<sup>37</sup> Priestley, M. (2003) *Disability. A Life Course Approach*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 4.

<sup>38</sup> Mechant, M., De Lange, S., De Veirman, S., Devos, I. & Matthys, C. (2012) "Mogelijkheden en beperkingen van de levensloopenanalyse voor het vroegmoderne demografisch onderzoek in Vlaanderen" In: Kok, J. & Matthijs, K. (eds.) *De levensloopenbenadering in de historische demografie*. Leuven: Acco, 78.

fore, by using life course analysis and EHA it becomes possible to examine the effect an impairment had on the timing of a transition and answer questions such as: Do individuals with an impairment marry later? And do they die sooner as a result of their impairment? Section 2.2 discusses the use of this type of analysis in my dissertation in more detail.

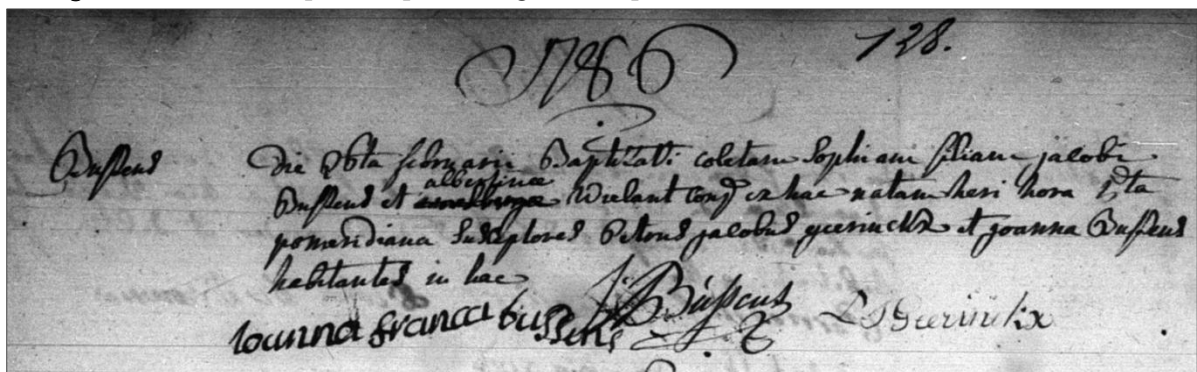
As duration is the dependent variable within EHA, it is important to have continuous data series in which the exact dates of the events in the lives of individuals are known. Life course research therefore requires individual-level longitudinal data. In other words, it requires sources in which individuals can be followed throughout their lives and in which the exact timing of events is recorded. Vital registration data (parish and civil registers), and especially population registers, fit this purpose and constitute the main sources for this life course reconstruction and analysis.

### 2.1.2.2 Parish registers

Parish registers are available for most villages from the second half of the seventeenth century and consist of certificates of baptisms, marriages and funerals within a given parish. Parish registers were kept up to date by the parish priest. Depending on his dedication, the quality of the registers could vary greatly.

Baptismal certificates usually recorded the date and the names of the child, parents and godparents. In the case of marriage, the date, names of both partners, sometimes their place of origin, and the names of the two witnesses were mentioned. In some parishes at the end of the eighteenth century, the bride and groom were asked to sign the certificate, providing a crude indication of literacy. The burial certificates communicate the date, the name of the deceased, usually with a reference to the father (“daughter/son of”) or marriage partner (“spouse/widow(er) of”), and the person’s age.

**Figure 2.6** Example of a parish register, baptismal certificate



Source: State Archives Beveren

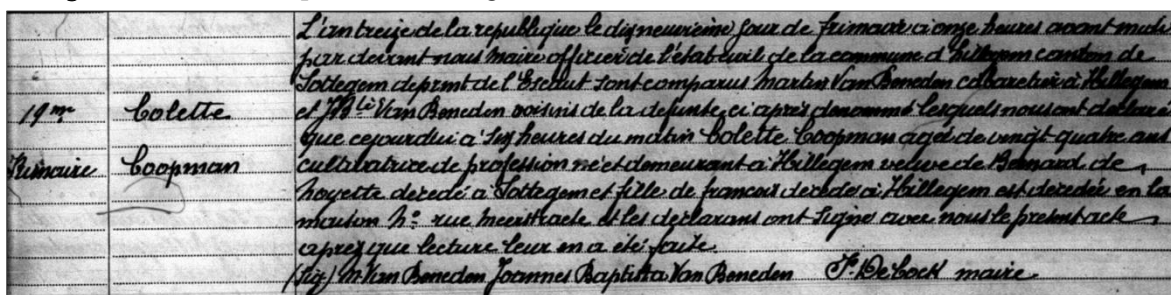
As many research individuals of the first cohort were born, married and became a parent in the period before the introduction of civil registration, I had to rely mostly on the parish registers for their life histories. The registers of all parishes within East Flanders are kept in the State Archive of Beveren, where they can be consulted on microfilm. For most of the parishes an alphabetical index was available, which facilitated the search.

### 2.1.2.3 Civil registers

From 1796 onwards, all births, marriages and deaths had to be declared to the municipal government.<sup>39</sup> Information in the civil certificates is similar to that in the parish registers, but more detailed and standardized. Besides giving the information outlined above, civil certificates also contain information on the ages, places of residence and occupations of the parents and witnesses in birth certificates, and of the deceased and his or her spouse in death certificates.<sup>40</sup> Marriage registers provide similar information for both spouses, their parents and the four witnesses. If marriage partners had been previously married and/or had children out of wedlock, this was also recorded.

Civil certificates from 1796 to 1870 are preserved in the State Archive of Beveren for most East Flemish municipalities. Certificates from 1870 to the present are kept in the archive of the registry office within each municipality.<sup>41</sup> 251 research individuals, living in 82 different municipalities, survived after 1870. I searched for the civil certificates of these individuals in 52 municipal archives.

Figure 2.7 Example of a civil register, death certificate



Source: State Archives Beveren

<sup>39</sup> For information on the establishment and development of civil registration: Bracke, N. (2008) *Een monument voor het land*. Civil registration can be regarded as the successor to parish registers, although parish registers did not immediately cease to exist under French rule, when civil registration was introduced.

<sup>40</sup> When an individual was unmarried, the death certificate provided information on the parents of the deceased.

<sup>41</sup> Registers of formerly independent municipalities are usually kept in the main municipality.

For individuals that remained in the same parish their whole lives, records in parish and civil registers can be linked to construct their life histories. Herein lies the most important limitation of the registers. If individuals are highly mobile, record linkage may only be possible for a segment of the life course. As parish and civil registers do not provide information on the timing or even occurrence of out-migration or immigration in the municipality, many research individuals are *lost* in migration. As a result, there is an over-representation of complete life histories for a possibly unrepresentative group of sedentary individuals. A related limitation of vital registration data is that the registers are silent on what happens to individuals in between births, marriages and deaths. Even for those who remained in the village long enough for records of their events to be linked, the registers do not provide details on their household context, socio-economic status, or other characteristics during the time between events. Except for when they are combined with other sources, vital registration data is only suitable for studies of differentials in demographic behaviour of a limited scope.<sup>42</sup>

#### 2.1.2.4 Population registers

In 1795 the French government made it mandatory for the Belgian departments to compile lists of all inhabitants, recording their names, ages, places of birth and residence, and occupation. The United Kingdom of the Netherlands (1815-1830) and an independent Belgium (1830 onwards) adopted these population registers in their administrations. Nonetheless, until 1846 most municipalities failed to keep track of their populations except in civil registration and the occasional census (1796, 1806, 1814-15 and 1830). The census of 1846 was therefore presented by the central government as the starting point for new, compulsory population registers. After each of the ten-yearly censuses, the filing cards of the census had to be converted into registers in which every page was devoted to a household (all the people living at the same address).<sup>43</sup>

Each member of the household was recorded, with their name, occupation, place of birth, age or date of birth, marital status, date of arrival in the municipality and the previous residence. If a new person entered the household through birth or immigration,

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<sup>42</sup> Campbell, C. (2012) "Historical Demography" In: Liang, Z. (ed.) *Demography*. Beijing: Renmin University Press, 233-65.

<sup>43</sup> Bracke, N. (2008) *Een monument voor het land*, 303-6. Censuses were held in 1846, 1856, 1866, 1880 and from then on every ten years. After every census a new population register was drawn up. For a comprehensive discussion of the Belgian parish, civil and population registers, I refer to: Devos, I. & Vandembroeke, C. (2004) "Historische demografie" In: Art, J. & Boone, M. (eds.) *Inleiding tot de lokale geschiedenis van de 12de tot de 18de eeuw*. Ghent: Mens & Cultuur Uitgevers, 178-222; Art, J. & Vanhaute, E. (eds.) *Inleiding tot de lokale geschiedenis van de 19de en de 20ste eeuw*. Ghent: Mens & Cultuur Uitgevers.



or if a person changed marital status, moved within the community or died in the period leading up to the next census, then the registers had to be amended. In the case of relocation within the municipality or out-migration, the date of departure and destination (street and/or municipality) were indicated. As a result, population registers not only document particular moments in life, but provide a continuous description of household composition and individual trajectories. Based on population registers, individuals can be followed throughout their lives, even highly mobile ones.

The dynamic character and up-to-date availability of cross-sectional and individual data made population registers popular for historical demographic research. For life course analysis in particular, population registers have proven their worth.<sup>44</sup> However, the use of population registers, especially of the first editions, is not without difficulties. Although population registers became universal in every Belgian municipality after 1846, many registers are incomplete – partly as a result of poorly organized local administrations, partly because the population did not always register events. In the case of migration to another municipality, individuals were removed from the population register in the village of departure and registered at the town of destination. However, migrants often failed to inform the local administration of their departure and/or arrival, especially in the case of short-term migrations. If an individual was not deregistered and no place of destination was recorded, the life course reconstruction stops abruptly.

An acute issue, for future research in particular, is the preservation of the population registers. Population registers are preserved at a municipal level, usually at the town hall. The conditions of the repositories, however, leave much to be desired. Registers are stored in basements and attic rooms where they are exposed to damp and dirt. Many municipalities have lost registers; the early editions especially have tended to disappear. For this research, I consulted the registers of 116 municipalities. In 58.7 percent of the municipalities registers were available from 1847 or earlier. However, in 28.4 percent of the towns the availability varied from 1851 to 1900 due to loss or damage. The decision to give access to population registers is made locally. In fifteen towns (12.9 percent), the population registers were not accessible to the public. The municipal preservation of the registers also entails practical difficulties. Whenever an individual moved from one town to another, I also had to move to a different town. Several times I had to return to municipalities where I had already consulted the registers, because of the immigration of a research individual. As a consequence, I decided not to follow individuals outside

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<sup>44</sup> E.g. The “Life Courses in Context” programme in the Netherlands, <<http://www.lifecoursesincontext.nl/index.html>>; Kertzer, D.I. & Schiaffino, A. (1986) “Historical Demographic Methods of Life-Course Study” In: Fry, C.L. & Keith, J. (eds.) *New Methods for Old-Age Research: Strategies for Studying Diversity*. South Hadley: Bergin and Garvey Publishers, 77-103; Alter, G. (1988) *Family and the Female Life Course*.

the borders of East Flanders. If a man or woman moved outside the province and the town of destination was known, I contacted the local administration of the municipality in question by e-mail. In some cases, staff members were obliging and provided me with additional information. In other cases, the life course reconstruction of the person remained incomplete. In most municipalities alphabetical indices were available to facilitate the search for individual people. However, in cities of large population sizes, the indices themselves spread over multiple volumes, rendering the search more time-consuming.

The bad conditions in which many registers are preserved, as well as the practical difficulties underline the importance of digitization projects such as the *Historical Database of the Liège Region*, based on the population registers and civil registration of eleven communities in the province of Liège, and the *COR\*-database* for the Flemish region around Antwerp.<sup>45</sup> More and more local governments are also deciding to digitize their vital registration data and population registers. The city of Ghent has started to digitize its earliest population registers (1798-1846) and offers digitized indices from 1847 onwards. These initiatives will enhance the possibilities for future life course research tremendously.

#### 2.1.2.5 Research population

The list of 399 deaf men and women was the starting point of a life course reconstruction based on the use of vital registration data and population registers. For each deaf person I attempted to collect: a birth, marriage and death certificate and the birth certificates of their children. If the children and the spouse died within the same municipality as the research individual, I examined their death certificates as well. If a person was alive at a time for which population registers are available, I expanded the information from the certificates with information from the population registers.

An individual was only kept in the dataset if besides the birth certificate I found additional information in other certificates or population registers. Table 2.2 presents the number of men and women for which (part of) the life course could be reconstructed, alongside the source. The percentages between brackets present the ratio of the number

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<sup>45</sup> The HLDR (1806-1900) was constructed as part of the Eurasia Project, under the supervision of Michel Oris and George Alter, <<http://www.ehps-net.eu/databases/historical-database-li%C3%A8ge-region>>. The COR\* database (1846-1920) is an ongoing database project run by sociologists at the Catholic University of Leuven, <[http://soc.kuleuven.be/ceso/historischedemografie/resources/pdf/Matthijs\\_Moreels\\_2010.pdf](http://soc.kuleuven.be/ceso/historischedemografie/resources/pdf/Matthijs_Moreels_2010.pdf)>.

selected for the dataset to the initial number. This dataset of 284 deaf men and women constitutes the definitive dataset that is used in the analyses of the thematic chapters.

**Table 2.2** Overview of the definitive dataset according to source, in N (%)

	Deaf research population			
	Born 1748-1810		Born 1830-1860	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
<b>N=</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>66</b>
Conscription registers	44 (76%)	-	17 (61%)	-
Individual bulletins	3 (100%)	0 (0%)	23 (92%)	4 (100%)
“State of all the deaf-mutes”	38 (61%)	51 (70%)	-	-
Institut Royal des Sourdes-Muettes	-	3 (100%)	-	62 (74%)
Institut Royal des Sourds-Muets	-	-	39 (67%)	-

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

The major reason for the loss of individuals is migration. In the period before 1846, before population registers are available, migration was not registered. When I did not find the marriage and/or death certificate of a person in the place of birth, I assumed that the person had moved in the course of his or her life. As the place of destination was unknown, however, the possibilities for life course reconstruction ended. As a result, the dataset is characterized by a higher representation of more *stable* deaf men and women. A problem more specifically related to the study of people with an impairment is institutionalization. Population registers usually contain limited information about the residents of an institution. Besides their names, generally only their date and place of birth are recorded. Moreover, if a person left the institution for the house of their parents, other family members or for another institution, this migration was only rarely recorded. The fact that people within an institution were usually still domiciled at their parents' house or the house of a relative, probably explains this anomaly. At the address of domicile, however, they were often 'forgotten' in the population registers as they were not present in the house at the moment of registration. As a result, some individuals disappeared after leaving the institution in which they lived. Additionally, parents could have moved while a deaf person was institutionalised. So, if that person was to return to the parents, the movements of the parents had to be tracked as well, making the reconstruction even more time-consuming.

Migration was also the most important reason why not all research individuals could be followed until death. Individuals could move outside the region of East Flanders, at which point the reconstruction was terminated, or they could move to an unknown des-

tionation. Table 2.3 shows the final observed events for the 284 deaf individuals in the definitive dataset.<sup>46</sup>

**Table 2.3** Last observed event in the life courses of the deaf research population, in N (%)

Last observed event	N=	Born 1748-1810		Born 1830-1860	
		Men 85	Women 54	Men 79	Women 66
Marriage		-	-	1 (1%)	-
Childbirth		-	-	1 (1%)	1 (2%)
Death		83 (97%)	51 (94%)	65 (82%)	55 (83%)
Migration		1 (1%)	3 (6%)	12 (15%)	10 (15%)
Other		1 (1%)	-	-	-

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Table 2.3 indicates that 254 deaf individuals could be followed until death (83 percent). 26 people migrated outside East Flanders or to an unknown destination. The life course reconstruction of 4 individuals came to a halt after marriage, the birth of a child or when they appeared as a witness in the death certificate of a parent (*other*).

### 2.1.3 Hearing siblings as control group

The impact of a hearing impairment on a person's life can only be fully assessed in the comparison with the lives of people without a hearing impairment. While identifying deaf people in historical sources requires some creativity, finding non-deaf men and women is assumed to be less complicated. The birth registers provide hundreds of individuals, born in the same municipality and the same year as the deaf men and women. However, how can one be certain that a person is not disabled, as impairments are not indicated? Moreover, a randomly selected control group could have a different socio-economic background, which would reduce the comparability with the deaf cohort.

Selecting one brother or sister for each deaf person rectifies this problem. The siblings of the deaf men and women would have grown up in the same household, and so had the same socio-economic background and, presumably, shared similar experiences through childhood. In this way, the side effects of different early life characteristics potentially influencing future life trajectories is minimized and the differences in the life trajectories of the deaf brothers and sisters can more easily be attributed to the pres-

<sup>46</sup> The incidence of migration among the research individuals is studied in Chapter 6 (6.2.4).

ence of a hearing impairment. For every deaf person, I selected one brother or sister on the basis of four criteria:

1. He or she has the same sex as the deaf cohort member to obtain a balanced number of men and women.
2. His or her date and place of birth are known.
3. He or she is born in the same cohort period (between 1748 and 1810 or between 1830 and 1860).
4. He or she lives to at least 16 years of age. All the deaf research individuals reached at least 16 years of age, so the siblings had to satisfy the same condition.

If more than one sibling met these criteria, the sibling closest in age to the deaf person was chosen. If a deaf man only had sisters or vice versa, the sister or brother that met all the other criteria was selected. As a result, the gender composition of the sibling population differs slightly from the deaf population. If a deaf person was an only (surviving) child, I selected a sibling from another deaf person living in the same or a similar municipality with the smallest age difference.

First, I reconstructed the composition of the parental household by using the parish and civil registers. Based on a search for children with the same last names in the indices, I collected the dates of birth of all children with the same parents as the deaf person. Half-brothers and half-sisters or stepbrothers and stepsisters were not taken into account. Next, I searched for the death certificate of the sibling fulfilling the above-mentioned criteria. If no death certificate was found until the sibling reached the age of 16, he or she was included in the control cohort.

To be certain that siblings were not deaf (or otherwise disabled) themselves, I checked their names in the sources that were used for identifying the deaf. I looked for brothers in the conscription register of the year in which they turned 20 to ascertain whether they were also rejected. The individual bulletins, the *Staat van alle de stomme-dooven* and the enrolment list of the school for deaf girls usually recorded whether a person had disabled family members. Furthermore, we can assume that if a deaf boy had a deaf brother then he would also attend the school for deaf boys in Ghent. If I did not find the brother's name in the population register or list of *doofstommen in de instelling van Gent*, I assumed that the sibling was hearing.<sup>47</sup> Table 2.4 gives an overview of the non-deaf research population according to birth cohort and gender.

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<sup>47</sup> The absence of siblings (or a mention of their disability) in the conscription registers, individual bulletins, "State of all deaf-mutes" and the enrolment list of the school for deaf girls enables one to rule out that they were in any way disabled. The absence of brothers in the population registers (at the address of the school for deaf boys) and the list of "deaf-mutes in the institution of Ghent" only indicates they were not deaf. In other words, while we can be certain that all the siblings were hearing, in a few cases they may have been otherwise

**Table 2.4** Overview of the sibling population, in N

	Men	Women	N
Born 1748-1810	78	61	139
Born 1830-1860	76	69	145

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

The life course reconstruction of the control group was performed in a similar way to the deaf cohorts. Table 2.5 shows the last observed event in the life course reconstruction of the hearing siblings. The majority of siblings could be followed until death (239 individuals, 84.2 percent).

**Table 2.5** Last observed event in the life courses of the sibling population, in N (%)

Last observed event	N=	Born 1748-1810		Born 1830-1860	
		Men 78	Women 61	Men 76	Women 69
Marriage		-	2 (3%)	3 (4%)	1 (1%)
Childbirth/Death of child		-	-	1 (1%)	5 (7%)
Death		70 (90%)	56 (92%)	57 (75%)	57 (83%)
Migration		3 (4%)	2 (3%)	15 (20%)	5 (7%)
Other		5 (6%)	1 (2%)	-	1 (1%)

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

## 2.2 Research methodology

I have structured the life course data, collected in the parish, civil and population registers, in an MS Access database.<sup>48</sup> This program for data management enables information from different types of sources to be linked together and connected to one individual through the attribution of a unique Person ID. The data in the dataset is structured alongside seven tables, which are all connected through *relationships*. Subsection 2.2.1 outlines these seven tables and illustrates how the data was translated into operational

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disabled. In no way, however, was the presence of another type of impairment indicated in the civil and population registers, nor was it suggested by their life course trajectories. As a precaution, however, the control group will be referred to as 'hearing' or 'non-deaf' instead of 'non-disabled'.

<sup>48</sup> A digital copy of the MS Access database can be found in the appendix.

variables for quantitative analysis. The applied bivariate and multivariate analysis techniques are discussed at the end of the subsection.

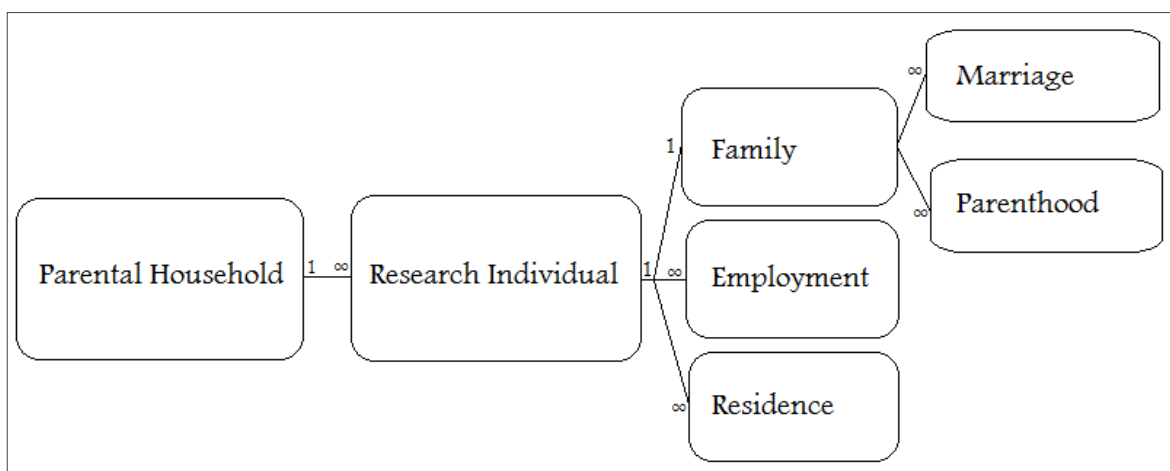
Although vital registration data enable us to uncover hidden patterns in the experiences of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century deaf people, the sources remain largely silent on matters of a more subjective and informal nature. The attitude of society in general and of different groups within society towards people with an impairment undoubtedly defined the lives of deaf people. Informal contacts among deaf people and between the deaf and the hearing left no traces in the standardized and impersonal administrative sources. To somewhat mitigate this source-related disadvantage, I have tried to supplement the life course data with more qualitative sources such as newspaper articles and contemporary literature, which document the social environment of the deaf men and women. To place the outcome of the life course analysis in a larger quantitative perspective, I turned to the statistical overviews of the *Commission Centrale de Statistique*, established in Belgium in 1841. This mix of qualitative and quantitative sources is discussed in subsection 2.2.2.

## 2.2.1 Operationalization

### 2.2.1.1 From sources to episodes

The life course data used for this research are classified in seven different tables, linked to each other by relationships. The structure of the database is schematically represented in figure 2.8.

**Figure 2.8** Relational structure of the MS Access database, research individual file



The database consists of two main files: a *parental household* file and a *research individual* file. The relationship between these files is “one to many”: at least two research individuals belong to the same parental household (the deaf person and his or her sibling). As siblings share the same parental household ID, research individuals can easily be linked in household structures. The 568 research individuals belong to 252 parental households.

The *parental household* file consists of four general variables and seven variables each for the father and mother. The four general variables are the number of children, residence, state of indigence and the presence of more than one deaf relative in the family. *Number of children* refers to the number of children born to the same parents, based on the information from the birth certificates. On average the parental household consisted of five children. *Residence* is the municipality in which the deaf and control child spent most of their childhood (up to the age of 16). This information is based on the residences recorded in the birth and, in the case of younger siblings dying, death certificates of all the children or, for the second research period, on the residential information in the population registers. The *state of indigence* of most parental households is unknown (80 percent). However, based on the *Staat van alle de stomme-dooven* and the list of enrolment of the school for deaf girls, I know that 37 families could be considered indigent, and 12 not. A checkbox indicates whether there was another deaf person in the family. The individual bulletins, the *Staat van alle de stomme-dooven* and the deaf school enrolment lists recorded whether another person in the family was also deaf. The administrative officers of some municipalities also noted whether a person was impaired in the population registers. So it was possible to identify other deaf members in the household. For a large number of families it was impossible to find out whether they were destitute or had more than one deaf family member. As a result, the variables *state of indigence* and *disability frequency* cannot be used to study frequencies of poverty or deafness within the research population. However, it is interesting to focus on those research individuals for whom both variables are known in order to study how poverty and the presence of other deaf family members influenced their life courses.

The information gathered for the fathers and mothers is based on their marriage and death certificates and the birth certificates of their children, which provided their names, occupations, levels of literacy, dates and places of birth and dates and places of death. The occupation recorded is the type of employment that was most commonly recorded in the birth certificates of the children. The level of literacy is based on the



crude indicator of a person’s signing ability in their marriage certificate.<sup>49</sup> I have noted extra information, such as the date of marriage and information from the death certificate, in a *notes* box. The birth dates of the siblings, sometimes complemented with information on their civil status, death or occupation, was recorded in a box entitled *siblings*.

Figure 2.9 is an example of the input form of the parental household file for a deaf person in the research population. Sophia Vanderlinden was born on November 4, 1801. She was the fourth of four children. Her father Josephus, a miller in Nederbrakel, died shortly after her birth. The occupations of both her parents, their level of literacy and the fact that they were “not indigent” indicates that she was born in a well-off family.

**Figure 2.9** Example of input form of parental household file

Parental household	
Parents ID	160 1
Residence	Nederbrakel
No. of children	4
State of indigence	Not indigent
>1 deaf relative	<input type="checkbox"/>
Name father	Josephus Vanderlinden
Name mother	Joanna Catharina Baert
Occupation father	Miller
Occupation mother	Farmer
Occupation type	Crafts - Food
Occupation type	Agriculture
Literacy father	Yes
Literacy mother	Yes
°Date father	03/07/1770
°Date mother	05/07/1762
°Place father	Nederbrakel
°Place mother	Elst
+Date father	11/10/1804
+Date mother	28/12/1839
Notes	Marriage: 05/05/1795 in Elst; 2nd marriage for Josephus; Josephus and Joanna Catharina are relatives in the fourth remove - Joanne Catharina remarries after the death of Josephus (new spouse: Karel Buydens) Death certificate Josephus: in Nederbrakel Death certificate Joanna Catharina: brewer, lives at "Dorp" in Nederbrakel
Siblings	Petrus Ludovicus: °1796 (dies after 1839) Joannes Baptiste: °14/04/1797 - dies in 1842 (control) Josephus Benedictus: °25/09/1798 - dies in 1822 (control) Sophia: °4/11/1801 (deaf)

The *research individual file* contains basic information on each of the 568 research individuals. The data in the research individual file refers to information that is invariable throughout a person’s life course: name, sex, date and place of birth, date and place of

<sup>49</sup> The use of signatures in the study of literacy is discussed in: Algoet, G. & Vandenbroeke, C. (1977) “Alfabetisme in Vlaanderen en inzonderheid in Zuidelijk Vlaanderen (eind 18<sup>de</sup> eeuw-1870)” In: *Vijfde jaarboek van de geschiedenis - en heemkundige kring 'De Gaversteke'*, V.

death and level of literacy. The two witnesses mentioned in the death certificate were recorded as well with their names, occupations, places of residence, ages and relationship to the deceased. Additionally, it was indicated whether a person belonged to the deaf or control research group, whether he was educated (yes, no or unknown) and if so, the name of the institution. The source in which the individual was identified is mentioned in another variable box. Later on, I added a few more variables to facilitate the analysis: the places of birth were divided into rural and urban municipalities, the age at death was calculated and added, a distinction was made between individuals belonging to the first (1748-1810) and second (1830-1860) birth cohort. Based on the number and birth dates of the siblings in the parental household file, I added the variable birth order.

Figure 2.10 shows the input form of the research individual file for Sophia Vanderlinden. Sophia was born deaf in Nederbrakel in 1801. She died in 1867 in the same municipality. Sophia signed her marriage certificate with her name, so she is considered literate. However, as no population registers are available for Nederbrakel before 1847 it is unknown whether she attended a deaf school during her childhood. She was probably not educated, as she was already 19 when the *Institut Royal des Sourdes-Muettes* was opened.<sup>50</sup>

**Figure 2.10** Example of input form of the research individual file

PersonsID	181	Parents ID	160
Research group	Deaf	Cohort	1
Name	Vanderlinden	Sophia	F
°Date	04	11	1801
Order	4		
°Residence	Nederbrakel	Rural	
Death	13	12	1867
	66.10	Nederbrakel	
Witness 1:	Augustinus De Staercke	M	Spouse
	Brewer	Nederbrakel	67
Witness 2:	Louis Blommaert	M	Acquaintance
	Tax collector	Nederbrakel	29
Literate	Yes	Educated	Unknown
Education	Unknown		
Notes			
Source	State of all the deaf-mutes		

<sup>50</sup> As Sophia was probably not educated, it is likely that she was able to write her name (as in her marriage certificate), but was otherwise mainly illiterate.

The *research individual* file is connected to five subtables, relating to a person’s *family*, *employment* and *residence*. As a person can have multiple residences and different occupations throughout their life, the relationship with the research individual file is “one to many”. A person is considered to have one family, but can be married and become a parent several times in their life course, which explains the “one to many” relationship between *family* and the *marriage* and *parenthood* tables. The subtables link all the information about one person by assigning the same Person ID to each table.

The *employment* table consists of one record for each unique occupation (figure 2.11). When a person was recorded as unemployed or retired in the historical sources, this also resulted in a new record. In the table, I recorded the original description of the occupation, a contemporary translation and a broader type of occupation. The division into seven types of occupation is based on the typology of Jaspers and Stevens (see Chapter 4). The type and date of the sources in which the same occupation was recorded are listed in order to reconstruct a person’s occupational career, study the moment of retirement and the incidence of unemployment.

**Figure 2.11** Example of input form of the employment table

Employment				
EmploymentID	183	PersonsID	181	
Occupation (orig.)	Landbouwster			
Occupation	Farmer			
Occupation (type)	Agriculture			
Source	Marriage certificate	06	06	1843
Source	Marriage certificate	13	04	1850
Source				
Notes				
Record: 1 of 3   No Filter   Search				

Sophia Vanderlinden married twice. In both her marriage certificates, from 1843 and 1850, she was recorded as being a farmer. The sources mentioned three different occupations for Sophia – the record shown is 1 of 3 records. At the time of birth of her only child she was a “*particulière*” (special), and when she died in 1867 she was without occupation.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>51</sup> The meaning of the designation “*bijzondere*” or “*particulière*” (special) has been the topic of discussion. It has been suggested that this term was used for women who were able to live on income from their movable

The *residence* table contains all the observations related to a person's place of residence (figure 2.12). The introduction of population registers in 1847 means that from this time onwards it is possible to reconstruct the residential situation of a person quite accurately. The registers indicate the address and date on which a person moved to this address, as well as the destination and date of migration within or outside the municipality. When population registers are absent, the residence of a person can be deduced from vital registration. However, as the certificates only record information at that specific moment in time, it is uncertain how long a person had been and would be residing at that address. Moreover, a person may have moved between life events without my knowledge, leading to an under-registration of residences in the database. If observations within vital registration succeeded each other relatively quickly, for example in the case of multiple childbirths, and the certificates recorded the same street name, I assumed that a person had not moved in between the birth of his or her children.

The residence table lists information on the municipality, the name of the street, as well as the date on which or the dates between which a person lived at that address. Furthermore, I have specified whether the person was institutionalized at that time, either in an educational or care-giving setting, or was living in. An underaged person would obviously have lived in the parental household. To differentiate between adults and children living with their parents (or others), a checkbox was added to indicate whether the person was a minor (under 16). Additional information was gathered with regard to other individuals living in the household, and information about the type of street or house (for example, bad neighbourhood or living in a room above an inn) was placed in a notes box.

Sophia Vanderlinden was identified in the *Staat van alle de stomme-dooven*. At that time (1821) she was living with her parents in her town of birth, Nederbrakel. Population registers became available for Nederbrakel in 1847. At this point Sophia lived in Wielandaelstraat in Nederbrakel together with her husband, daughter and three servants. She was recorded at the same address in the population registers of 1857 and 1867, although the household composition changed slightly. She died in the same house in December 1867. In the case of Sophia Vanderlinden, no residence record was created based on her birth certificate, as population registers did not exist when she was born. Her birth certificate and those of her siblings only mention the municipality in which they were born, so a residence record would provide no extra information. A residence record was

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and/or immovable property, but had no other financial assets (like persons living off the interest from investments); De Langhe, S. (2013) *Oude vrijsters: bestaansstrategieën van ongehuwde vrouwen op het Brugse platteland, late achttiende eeuw-begin negentiende eeuw*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished PhD dissertation), 57-8. The employment pattern of the research population is discussed in Chapter 4.

only created if a person was born at a time when population registers existed or if the name of the street was recorded in the birth certificate.<sup>52</sup>

Figure 2.12 Example of input form of the residence table

The final three tables are interrelated. The *family* table was created to summarize data from the underlying *marriage* and *parenthood* tables. It states if a person was married, and how many times, as well as whether a person had children, and how many. If I know that the household of a person lived in poverty, this is shown together with the source indicating the state of indigence (figure 2.13).

Figure 2.13 Example of input form of the family table

Information on marriages and children is linked to the family table by a shared Family ID. The information in the *marriage* table (figure 2.14) is mainly based on the marriage

<sup>52</sup> Successive siblings could be born in a different street, giving a rough indication of childhood migration.

certificate. I listed the date and place of marriage, and all the information on the spouse: name, occupation at time of marriage, literacy, date and place of birth. Information regarding the four witnesses was entered as well. Based on the population registers, or occasionally based on the marriage certificate, I was sometimes able to ascertain whether a spouse was disabled or not. If the spouse was the first to die, making the research individual a widow(er), the date and place of death of the spouse was recorded too, based on his or her death certificate. To facilitate analysis, the age at marriage of both marriage partners and the age at death of the spouse were calculated and added.

**Figure 2.14** Example of input form of the marriage table

**Marriage**

MarriageID: 15    FamilyID: 133    °Date sp.: 16 08 1799 43.81  
 Date: 06 06 1843    Age: 41.58    °Place sp.: Zarlardinge  
 Place: Nederbrakel    +Date sp.: 29 10 1845 46.2  
 Name spouse: Charles Lefebvre    +Place sp.: Nederbrakel  
 Occupation sp.: Breadbaker    End marriage: Partner dies  
 Literacy sp.: Yes    Disability sp.: No

Witness 1:	Pieter Bettesone	M	Acquaintance	Breadbaker	Nederbrakel	45
Witness 2:	Charles Denie	M	Acquaintance	Constable	Nederbrakel	47
Witness 3:	Jacobus Herregods	M	Acquaintance	Cooper	Nederbrakel	33
Witness 4:	Francies Tisselier	M	Acquaintance	Inn keeper	Nederbrakel	67

**Notes**  
 First marriage for both; In the marriage certificate, Sophia declares that she agrees to the marriage "met blijkbare en verstaenbare teekenen ten genoegen" ("with apparent and reasonable signs to the satisfaction")

Record: 1 of 2    Unfiltered    Search

Sophia was married twice, in 1843 and 1850, both times in the municipality of Nederbrakel. She was already 41 when she married for the first time to Charles Lefebvre, a bread baker from Zarlardinge who was two years older. It was the first marriage for both of them. Charles was not deaf as the marriage certificate indicates that only Sophia had to communicate by the use of signs. The marriage ended when Charles died two years later.

The *Parenthood* table (figure 2.15) contains information relating to the children of a research individual. The information is mainly based on the birth certificate: name, date and place of birth, as well as information on the two witnesses (names, sex, relationship to the child, occupation, residence and age). If a child died under the age of 16, the date and place of death was recorded. If a child died as an adult, the date and place of death was recorded if they died within the same municipality as the research individual. Likewise, it was noted when a child married within the same municipality, and the marriage certificate used to assess whether he or she was literate. The most frequently recorded

occupation was also entered. Based on the population registers and marriage certificate, it was ascertained whether a child was (hearing) impaired or not.

**Figure 2.15** Example of input form of the parenthood table

**Parenthood**

ChildID: 26 FamilyID: 133 +Date: 05 01 1850  
 Name: Maria Carolina Lefebvre F +Place: Nederbrakel  
 °Date: 06 08 1844 Died as a child (-16) Yes  
 °Place: Nederbrakel Occupation: /  
 Witness 1: Adolphus Vanderplancken M Married: / Literate: /  
 Unknown Candle maker Nederbrakel 32  
 Witness 2: Jan Baptist Linhout M  
 Unknown Rope weaver Nederbrakel 36  
 Disability: Unknown  
 Notes: Charles Lefebvre was recorded as farmer and brewer in the birth certificate

Record: 1 of 1 No Filter Search

As Sophia Vanderlinden was already over 40 when she entered into marriage, she only had one child, Maria Carolina, born 14 months after the marriage. At the age of 5, however, Maria Carolina died.

I filled in the above-mentioned input forms as much as possible, for all the research individuals. On the basis of the seven tables, an event file was created for all the men and women in the population. Table 2.6 illustrates the structure of an event file based on the life course of Sophia Vanderlinden. 181 refers to the unique Person ID (PID) of Sophia Vanderlinden. Every event in her life course was attributed a unique event ID (EID).

In this example, only a part of the event file is shown. In the actual event file more information is listed: age, the name of the street when known, the setting of the residence (institutionalized or living in), the composition of the household (presence of parents, siblings, spouse, children, family members and unrelated persons are listed in separate columns), occupation (with corresponding HISCO, HISCLASSs and SOCP0 codes<sup>53</sup>), the state of indigence if known, whether the father, mother and at least one sibling are alive, and the number of children alive – at the time of the event.

<sup>53</sup> HISCO and SOCP0 are two types of occupational classification schemes for occupational titles in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. HISCLASS recodes the historical occupational codes into a scheme of 12 social classes. See: <<http://hisco.antenna.nl/> and [historyofwork.iisg.nl/docs/hisclass-brief.doc](http://historyofwork.iisg.nl/docs/hisclass-brief.doc)>.

**Table 2.6** Basic event file of a person from the research population

PID	EID	Event	Date	Residence	Civil Status	No. Children
181	1	Birth	04/11/1801	Nederbrakel	Unmarried	0
181	2	Death father	11/10/1804	Nederbrakel	Unmarried	0
181	3	Residence	01/01/1821	Nederbrakel	Unmarried	0
181	4	Death mother	28/12/1839	Unknown	Unmarried	0
181	5	Marriage	06/06/1843	Nederbrakel	Married	0
181	6	Birth child	06/08/1844	Nederbrakel	Married	1
181	7	Death spouse	29/10/1845	Nederbrakel	Widow(er)	1
181	8	Residence	01/01/1847	Nederbrakel	Widow(er)	1
181	9	Death child	05/01/1850	Nederbrakel	Widow(er)	1
181	10	Marriage	13/04/1850	Nederbrakel	Married	1
181	11	Residence	01/01/1857	Nederbrakel	Married	1
181	12	Death	13/12/1867	Nederbrakel	Married	1

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Event history analysis is based on episodes in a person's life. An episode is a period between two events, in which the life course of a person was unchanged. Episodes have a start and end date, or from the perspective of the individual a start and end age, and succeed each other continuously along a time line. The event file database was converted into episode files as a function of event history analysis. Depending on the life event under observation, such as those presented in the different thematic chapters, an episode file can take on different forms.

Table 2.7 illustrates the episodes in the life of Sophia Vanderlinden with regard to her civil status, in the analysis of marriage opportunities (Chapter 5). A person is considered to be of marriageable age if between the ages of 15 and 50.

**Table 2.7** Marriage episode file of Sophia Vanderlinden

PID	Event 1	Start age	Event 2	End age	Civil Status
181	Entry	15	Marriage	41.58	Unmarried
181	Marriage	41.58	Death partner	43.98	Married
181	Death partner	43.98	Marriage	48.43	Widow
181	Marriage	48.43	End observation	50	Married

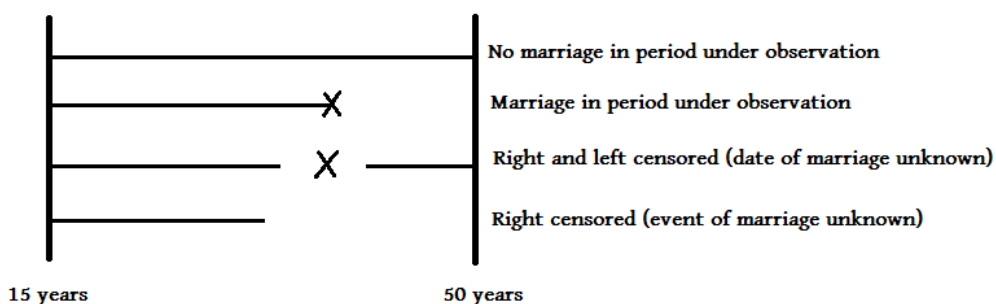
Source: MS Access database, research individual file

The conversion into episode files was hindered by several obstacles. To begin with, it was not possible to reconstruct the entire life course for all research individuals. As I mentioned above, several individuals were lost due to migration. This means that information is lacking for a considerable part of the population in the analysis of mortality. If they migrated before the age of 50, marriage analysis was hindered as well. This form of incomplete observation is called *right censoring*. *Left censoring* arises when a his-



tory is only partially observed so that some events occurred before the start of the observation period. Left censoring is less of an issue in this research as all the research individuals are observed from birth. However, in a few cases a research individual moved outside the region of East Flanders – at which stage the observation stopped – but re-entered the region later in life – coming under observation again. At that moment they might have been married (and widowed) in the period in which he or she was not under observation. In this case, a person is right and left censored. This type of incomplete observation can also be called *interval censoring*. Interval censoring implies that the exact event time (date of marriage) is not recorded, but is known to fall within a given range. This last type of censoring is quite common in historical life course analysis, and likewise in this research. The different periods and outcomes of observation in the analysis of marriage are illustrated in figure 2.12. The statistical technique of event history analysis can, however, take these incomplete life histories into account (see below). The exact number of research individuals under complete or partial observation is discussed in each of the thematic chapters.

**Figure 2.16** Examples of incomplete observation in the analysis of marriage



### 2.2.1.2 From research questions to a set of variables

Parallel with the two main research questions – how did the experiences of the deaf men and women differ from their hearing siblings? And how did experiences of the second birth cohort differ from those of the first? – the variables *research group* and *birth cohort* assume a central position throughout the study. Based on the literature, I assume limited differences in the experience of life events between the deaf and the non-deaf pre-industrial cohort. In the industrial cohort, the differences between the two research groups are expected to increase as a result of deteriorating conditions for the deaf.

The central hypothesis of this research starts from the assumption that industrialization and medicalization processes had an important impact on all aspects of the lives of the deaf. By dividing the research population into two birth cohorts, the impact of these modernization processes is roughly measured. Although potential differences in the living conditions of the two cohorts indicate the importance of nineteenth-century de-

velopments in the lives of the deaf, it is not proven that these differences are mainly the result of industrial development. To measure industrialization a more tangible parameter than cohort is required.

Based on the hypothesis, I assumed that the lives of people with a hearing impairment are similar across regions of similar economic development.<sup>54</sup> As industrialization unfolded, many of the industrial, commercial and social characteristics of society developed on a regional basis. Not all regions, however, experienced similar and simultaneous industrial development. Therefore, I classified the municipalities into three categories of industrial development based on the agricultural and industrial censuses of 1895 and 1896 respectively. By classifying the municipalities according to their level of industrialization (i.e. non-industrial, semi-industrial and industrial), I can assess the influence of industrialization in more depth. Allocating categories of industrialization to the municipalities was not an easy task. In 2.3.1 I describe how I determined the level of industrialization for each municipality.

*Research group, cohort and level of industrialization* constitute the main variables in this research. Depending on the event under observation, other variables complete the analytical framework. Table 2.8 lists the most important variables according to the different thematic events of interest. According to the different topics, several *covariates* are assumed to have a predictive power on the outcome. These explanatory variables are situated on the level of society, family (such as parents alive and the socio-economic status of the parental household, based on the father's occupation and literacy) and the individual (such as parity and the individual's literacy). Through these covariates, the research takes into account the historical context (*time* and *place*), the influence of pre-dating experiences (*life-span development*) and of the life courses of others (*linked lives*), all central features of the life course analysis. The composition and interpretation of the set of variables is not fixed, but differs depending on the thematic approach. The dependent and independent variables are introduced and discussed at the start of the analysis in each chapter.

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<sup>54</sup> This study does not deny the importance of other factors, such as personal characteristics and political-cultural features, on the life courses of the deaf (see 1.2.2.1). However, political-cultural differences between the different municipalities in the province of East Flanders are, due to the limited geographical span, considered negligible. Statistical analysis aims at uncovering patterns in the deaf lives. As a result, personal characteristics are blurred.

**Table 2.8** Research themes and their main variables

Chapter	Research theme	Analysis	Main variables	Population
3	Childhood	SES parents	Occupation	All
		Household size	Residence	
		Orphanhood	Birth dates	
		Family composition	Death dates	
4	Employment & Poverty	Unemployment	Occupation	All for whom at least one occupation is recorded
		Occupation types	Literacy	
		Link with education	Indigence	
		Link with poverty	Age	
		Retirement		
5	Marriage	Frequency	Civil status	All
		Timing	Age at marriage	Married
		Spouse characteristics	Occupation	Married
6	Physical & Social mobility	Household composition	Residence	All
		Migration		
		Social networks	Age, occupation, origin and relationship to the witnesses	All for whom a marriage/death certificate is available
7	Formal care	Living situation Institutionalization	Residence	All
	Old age & mortality	Living situation Timing	Residence Age at death	All for whom a death certificate is available

### 2.2.1.3 Bivariate and multivariate analyses

This research combines different types of statistical analysis. Each thematic chapter starts with the presentation of some descriptive bivariate analyses. This usually involves creating a percentage table of the number of people that witness a certain event or meet certain criteria. For example, in Chapter 4 I plot a representation of the research individuals in the different occupational sectors. Chapter 5 begins with a table representing the proportion of research individuals who experienced marriage. Cross tabulations represent an important tool for providing a comprehensive overview of the relation between two or more variables. In Chapter 6, the correspondence in occupation between a research individual and the witness present at their death (same, different or unknown) is related to gender, research group and cohort. Chapter 7 presents cross tabulations that illustrate how mortality is related to gender and age group.

Multivariate analysis enables one to compare the variable of interest with several potentially predictive covariates. As such, multivariate analysis increases the possibility of identifying more variables that affect the outcome, and so grasping the factors at work that remain hidden in bivariate methods. For example, low marriage rates may not necessarily be the result of a hearing impairment, but may be attributable to a low socioeconomic background. Applying multivariate analyses is indispensable for determining to what extent the life course trajectories of people were the result of their impairment and birth cohort, rather than the result of other more influential factors.

The method of multivariate analysis used in this research is event history analysis (EHA). An event history is a longitudinal record of the timing of the incidence of one or more types of event. For example, employment histories focus on the points in time at which a person starts a new occupation or becomes unemployed. Partnership histories might focus on the dates when a person enters or leaves marital life. EHA is used to study the duration until the occurrence of the event of interest. In the above-mentioned examples, the event of interest could be unemployment or marriage. The duration in EHA is measured from the time when an individual becomes exposed to the *risk* of experiencing the event. A person is at risk of becoming unemployed from the moment they are employed, of leaving marital life from the moment they marry. The start of the risk period is not always obvious, and needs to be determined by the researcher. The risk period in the study of fertility can start at marriage or start at the age of 15, when a woman is considered to be of child-bearing age.<sup>55</sup> The concept *population at risk* refers to the part of the research population that could potentially experience the event. EHA is also known as *survival analysis*, *duration analysis* or *hazard modelling*. In survival analysis, the concept *survival* is used when an event is not experienced. *Failure* is used to refer to the occurrence of the event. Hazard models examine the *hazard rate*, which is the conditional probability that an event occurs at a particular time.

EHA enables one to deal with two particular features related to the study of individual longitudinal data. First, a part of the population can leave observation before the end of the period at risk (*right censoring*). Second, some of the variables that could influence the timing of an event may change value over the course of the observation period. Such variables are called *time-varying covariates*.<sup>56</sup>

In 2.2.1.2 I addressed the problem of incomplete observations. Left censoring is the most difficult to handle and the most common approach is to exclude such observations

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<sup>55</sup> Steele, F. (2005) "Event History Analysis. Review Paper" ESRC National Centre for Research Methods, Bristol, <<http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/88/1/MethodsReviewPaperNCRM-004.pdf>>, consulted on 22/01/2014.

<sup>56</sup> See for example: Alter, G., Devos, I. & Kvetko, A. (2009) "Completing Life Histories with Imputed Exit Dates: A Method for Historical Data from Passive Registration Systems" *Population*, 62/2, 327-53.

from the analysis. Fortunately, the number of left-censored cases in this research is negligible. One could also just exclude right-censored observations from the analysis. However, this approach could not only lead to a drastic reduction in sample size, but also a substantial bias. Suppose we exclude all women who left observation before the age of 50 in the analysis of the event of marriage. Then the excluded cases may include a considerable group of women who have not yet had a chance to marry. Omitting these women will bias the sample towards young women who married early. Event history models, however, keep right-censored cases in the analysis as they use estimates based on the population available.

Besides longitudinal information on the timing of events, life course analysis also collects data on changes in individual characteristics or circumstances over time. For example, residential histories make it possible to determine whether a person is institutionalized at a given point in time. In the analysis of marriage, it is interesting to examine the relationship between an individual's probability of marrying at a certain time ( $t$ ) and whether they are institutionalized at that time. Institutionalization is an example of a time-varying covariate, as a person's institutional status (whether or not institutionalized) can change over time. A crude approach would be to take the value of such variables at one point in time, such as the start of the observation period – for example, whether a person was institutionalized at age fifteen in the analysis of marriage. As the example shows, this approach does not allow one to explore how the timing of an event relates to a change in the value of a covariate. By structuring the data in the form of episode files, however, it is possible to create a new episode for each change in the covariate of interest.

This research applies both descriptive and explanatory EHA techniques. The descriptive technique most used is the analysis of Kaplan Meier estimates. Kaplan Meier estimates are usually plotted in survival curves that show the probability of surviving within a given length of time. The advantage of Kaplan Meier curves is that they take into account duration and right-censored data, as they assume that individuals who are censored have the same survival prospects as those who are followed until the end of observation. The aim of most event history techniques, however, is to identify the factors that explain the timing of the event of interest. How does the presence of a hearing impairment affect the incidence and timing of life events such as marriage and death? In other words, to what extent is the outcome (dependent variable) explained by certain characteristics (independent variables)? There is a wide range of event history models to choose from. We can make a rough distinction between continuous-time models and discrete-time models. Continuous-time models require the timing of events to be known precisely. Discrete-time methods are used when it is only known that the event occurred within a particular time interval (e.g. within a certain year), but the exact time is

unknown. For most of the events studied in this research, the exact data are available, allowing the use of continuous-time models.<sup>57</sup>

The specific continuous-time model used in this study is the Cox proportional hazards model, which can be considered the most flexible model, and therefore the most frequently used. The main assumption of the Cox regression is that the effects of covariates remain unchanged during the whole period under observation ( $t$ ). For example, a Cox model assumes that the influence of a person's gender on his risk of dying remains the same at every time (age). In some of the analysis in this research, this proportionality assumption did not hold. In these cases, I either chose to split the time axis (period under observation) into sections within which the proportionality assumption did hold, continuing with a separate analysis for each time period, or to fit a stratified Cox model. A stratified model allows the form of the baseline hazard to vary across strata, while the effects of other covariates are assumed time-invariant. The results of the Cox models are presented in tables, which list the *hazard ratio* or *relative chance* for each covariate. Each covariate consists of two or more subcategories. For example, *Research group* has the subcategories *deaf* and *siblings*, the residential situation can be *institutionalized*, *living in* or *living independently*. One of these categories within each covariate is specified as the reference category. The hazard ratio of the reference category is 1. The other categories have values that are lower or higher than 1, indicating a lower or higher chance of experiencing the event. The p-value indicates the statistical significance of the results. Statistical significance is the probability that the effect of a covariate is not the result of chance. An effect can be significant at the 10 percent (<0.100), 5 percent (<0.050) or 1 percent (<0.010) level.

For some analyses it was not important to analyse the timing of an event, but only whether the event occurred or not. For example, in the study of social networks of the deaf, I was only interested in the covariates that contributed to the presence of a relative at the time of death – not in the time until death. In these types of analysis, I chose to apply logistic regression models, which enable one to study the extent to which covariates explain the incidence of an event. Logistic regression models in this research assume a binary outcome (the event occurred or did not occur), while the independent variables could be both nominal and ordinal.

The bivariate and multivariate analyses described here are applied to the longitudinal individual life course data of the research population. However, as numbers aren't everything, it is important to reflect on the statistical results from a broader quantitative

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<sup>57</sup> A comprehensive overview of the different models and an elaborate description of event history analysis can be found in: Mills, M. (2011) *Introducing Survival and Event History Analysis*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

and qualitative framework. Dealing with quantitative snapshots in time such as censuses on the one hand, and qualitative evidence such as newspaper articles on the other requires a different methodological approach. In the remainder of this section, I present the additional sources on which the dissertation is based, as well as the ways in which they were analysed.

## 2.2.2 A quantitative and qualitative mix

### 2.2.2.1 “Exposé de la situation du Royaume”

The Belgian organization of government statistics underwent a major revision in 1841. Faced with a national statistical apparatus that was failing to produce general statistics on Belgium, but inspired by the bipartite statistical model of the Netherlands, the Ministry of the Interior decided to establish the *Commission Centrale de Statistique* (Central Statistics Commission) to coordinate the executive *Bureau de Statistique Générale* (Central Statistics Office).<sup>58</sup> In concrete terms, the commission had to develop ways to publish the results of government statistics and advise the Ministry of the Interior based on the numerical data available.

The commission published three sets of statistics: the extensive *Exposé de la situation du Royaume*, and the more concise *Documents Statistiques* (until 1870) and *Annuaire Statistique* (from 1870). It published four editions of *Exposé de la situation du Royaume*, dealing with the periods 1841-1850 (published in 1852), 1851-1860 (published in 1865), 1861-1875 (published in 1885) and 1876-1900 (published in 1912). All the editions, except the first one, provide statistical information on the deaf-mute, blind and insane populations in their second chapter on population. The most detailed information on the deaf population appears in the 1851-1860 edition. The statistics with regard to the deaf and blind in this volume are based on the provincial censuses of 1858, which also resulted in the drawing up of individual bulletins (2.1.1.2). The 1851-1860 edition provides a detailed overview of the size of the deaf population in each province, according to gender and

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<sup>58</sup> Founded in 1831, the *Bureau de Statistique Générale* was engaged not in the production of statistics, but in bringing together numerical data from the different ministries. However, the statistical overviews of the bureau showed little coherence. The commission was therefore instructed to coordinate the existing statistical endeavours and standardize the government statistics into a coherent and comprehensive entity. Stimulated by the supervisory commission, the bureau became an important producer of demographical and economical statistical overviews. From the middle of the 1840s the bureau was responsible for the organization of the ten-yearly censuses of population, industry and agriculture. See: Bracke, N. (2008) *Een monument voor het land*, 180-220.

living arrangements. In addition to the general population sizes, the edition also provides more comprehensive information on the deaf within each province, such as their marital status, state of indigence, level of education, cause of deafness and the coexistence of other impairments besides deafness. On a national scale, the edition lists the number of deaf-mutes according to age, occupation, age at which they became deaf and the number of family members who are also deaf. The last two editions are less detailed in their descriptions of the deaf population. The 1861-1875 edition lists the number of deaf boys and girls in the twelve deaf schools in the country, as well as the general number of deaf men and women in each province based on population censuses (1835, 1858, 1866 and 1875). The 1876-1900 edition presents the total number of deaf people, as well as the number of deaf men and women in “special institutes”, “other institutions” and those “taken care of at home”, for each province for the years 1880, 1890 and 1900.

The 1841-1850 edition did not examine the statistical state of the deaf. However, the results of the first general census of the deaf in 1835 were retrieved in two ways. Firstly, the 1851-1860 edition gave a short summary of the results of this census to enable comparison with the 1858 census. The numbers of deaf people and their ratios to the total population were recorded for each province, and issues of heredity and state of indigence were discussed in general. Secondly, a more detailed “*statistique des sourds-muets et des aveugles de la Belgique [...], d’après un recensement opéré en 1835*” (Statistics of deaf-mutes and blind people in Belgium [...] according to a census organised in 1835) was published in 1847 in the *Bulletin de la Commission Centrale de Statistique*.

By combining the information from the different editions, it is possible to map out the evolution of the East Flemish deaf population in the course of the nineteenth century. Table 2.9 shows the number of deaf men and women in East Flanders from 1835 to 1900, and their ratio to the East Flemish population as a whole.

**Table 2.9** East Flemish deaf population according to gender (1835-1900), in N

Year	Men	Women	Total	Incidence
1835	177	138	315	1 in 2391
1858	212	146	358	1 in 2198
1866	164	155	319	1 in 2707
1875	226	212	438	1 in 1982
1880	140	129	269	1 in 3243
1890	171	154	325	1 in 2903
1900	204	178	382	1 in 2578

Source: *Exposé de la situation du Royaume*

Nineteenth-century East Flanders had on average 344 deaf individuals in its population. Except for 1875 and 1880, the deaf population was relatively constant. Between 1875 and



1880 the deaf population in East Flanders dropped by 39 percent. Undoubtedly, this is the result of different counting methods rather than a reflection of a real decline in the deaf population. Historian Nele Bracke considers the information in the editions to be “*genuine, but not exhaustive and not always exact*”. This statement is based on judgements by the commission itself. In the 1851-1860 edition, it was indicated that the commission “*ne [veulent] pas affirmer que, partout dans ces gros volumes, on rencontrera une certitude mathématique, des chiffres toujours incontestables*” (did not want to confirm that, especially in the large volumes, one could find a mathematical certainty, figures that were always incontestable). Thus the numbers in the statistical overviews should not be considered mathematical certainties, as some are always “*approximative, fondée sur des moyennes et dans laquelle on approche de la vérité*” (approximative, based on averages and approaching the truth). However, although some statistics represent approximations, the commission believed that the editions provided “*les éléments d’appréciations propres à fonder des conclusions aussi vraies qu’il est possible de les obtenir en statistique*” (estimations suitable to justify conclusions equally true as those obtainable from statistics).<sup>59</sup>

Due to its level of detail, the 1858 statistics on the deaf population can be considered more reliable. 185 of the 284 deaf individuals in the research population, 97 men and 88 women, were alive and living in East Flanders in 1858. This implies that the research population represents respectively 45.8 and 60.3 percent of the total male and female East Flemish deaf population in 1858. The 358 deaf men and women in East Flanders represented 18 percent of the total Belgian deaf population in 1858. As such, East Flanders had the highest ratio of deaf people in the country. The presence of many institutions in the province might account for this higher representation. These considerations illustrate the significant size of the research population compared to the total East Flemish deaf population.

The tables from the *Exposé de la situation du Royaume* were digitized in MS Excel data-sheets, enabling a quantitative analysis and visualization in graphs. In the thematic chapters, the results of the statistical analysis are compared to the general deaf statistics available. The census of 1858, being the most extensive one, is the most important point of reference. The information in the 1858 statistical overviews fits in with the information available for the research population, and can serve as a means to determine the extent to which the characteristics of the deaf research population fitted in with those of the total deaf population.

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<sup>59</sup> Faider, C. (1865) “Introduction” In: *Exposé (...) 1851-1860 (...)*, XVI. Cited by Bracke, N. (2008) *Een monument voor het land*, 267.

### 2.2.2.2 Discourse analysis of contemporary writing

To frame, interpret and supplement the quantitative, statistical data, I looked for sources of a more qualitative nature. The idea was to allow deaf individuals to speak for themselves by using ego-documents from people with a hearing impairment in nineteenth-century East Flanders. The Federation of Flemish Deaf Organizations (Fevlado) has developed an online catalogue of the historical archive of the society.<sup>60</sup> However, the earliest sources only date back to the beginning of the twentieth century, and a large majority postdates the 1950s. Moreover, only a few of the sources available are written from a personal perspective. In another attempt to find information about deaf lives and experiences from a more personal and local perspective, I made an appeal to over 45 local history clubs within the province of East Flanders. Many of the members of these clubs are actively engaged in archival research and may have been able to discover deaf men and women in a wide range of sources. Unfortunately, this appeal yielded few results. Two club members found a record of a deaf person in the *Staten van goed* (probate inventories) and *wettelijke passeringen* (legal transactions). *Staten van goed* are inventories that were established at the death of a person with minor children or other heirs, with the intention to protect their legacy. Registers of *wettelijke passeringen* list all agreements that were made before the aldermen within a village (purchases, sales, marriage contracts, etc.). Besides the name of the deaf person, however, these sources provided no more information. A few clubs referred to publications by local historians, which occasionally mentioned the case of a deaf man or woman. However, the story of this person was usually based on civil registration data, making it no more personal than the results of the life course analysis. Apparently the Flemish deaf had neither the means nor the opportunity to document their life stories. Outside the region of East Flanders I found one exceptional account of a deaf-mute person. Victor-Eugene George was born in 1806 in Cherbourg (France) and became deaf at the age of 3. In 1831 he moved to Mons (Hainaut), where he founded and became director of the *Institut des Sourds-Muets de Mons*. In 1839 he wrote down his memoirs and they were published in 1850.<sup>61</sup> The publication and preservation of this ego-document is mainly the result of the relatively elevated social status of its author, which is certainly reflected in his ex-

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<sup>60</sup> Fevlado, the Federation of Flemish Deaf Organizations, represents the Flemish deaf in general and the users of Flemish sign language in particular. The activities of Fevlado are mainly focused on policy making, raising social awareness, supporting the linguistic and socio-cultural community of deaf and hearing impaired people, as well as informing the general public about the different characteristics of deafness. The latter also involves the keeping of an archive. ([www.fevlado.be](http://www.fevlado.be))

<sup>61</sup> George, V.E. (1850) *Précis historique de la vie de Victor-Eugène George, de Cherbourg, sourd-muet...* Bruges: C. De Moor.

perience of disability. The extent to which his life course can be compared to those of other deaf men and women is therefore questionable.

Due to the lack of personal documents by the deaf, qualitative information had to be looked for in another context. In general, I made use of two types of qualitative sources in this research. Firstly, contemporary nineteenth-century publications addressing deafness from a mainly scientific perspective. And secondly, newspapers considered to be aimed at a broader audience.

Deafness was a point of interest in the nineteenth century, from a variety of perspectives. From a philosophical point of view, several authors addressed the question of which impairment, deafness or blindness, was the most unfortunate. The blind Pieter A. Rodenbach (1786-1869), Flemish politician and activist, compared his life as a blind man to that of the deaf in several publications. Similarly, the director of the institute for the deaf and blind in Bruges, Charles Louis Carton (1802-1863), wrote a comparative study on the deaf and blind in 1837. Even earlier, in 1817, A. Hartmann published a book on *l'état de l'aveugle-né, comparé à celui du sourd-muet*.<sup>62</sup> Another common approach to deafness was the evaluation of deaf education. This comes as no surprise as the nineteenth century witnessed a swift spread of deaf schools throughout Europe. Both Rodenbach and Carton wrote extensively on the topic. Others such as l'abbé Montaigne (1847), Vicomte Van Leempoel (1864), Désiré P.A. De Haerne (1865) and David Hirsch (1868) also addressed deaf instruction and the intellectual possibilities of the deaf within a Belgian context.<sup>63</sup> The letters by Father Josef Triest (2.1.1.4) can also be mentioned in this context. The rise of the eugenics movement and the question of intermarriage among the deaf stimulated many publications at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, most of the authors reflected on an American context. Studies from a medical perspective and a few rare cultural expressions, such as literature and theatre scripts in which deaf characters played a part, were found as well. Unfortunately, all originated from

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<sup>62</sup> Rodenbach, A. (1829) *Coup d'œil d'un aveugle sur les sourds-muets*. Brussels: Hauman; Rodenbach, A. & Berthier, M. (1852) *Levensbeschrijving van mynheer Alexander Rodenbach [...] gevolgd door eene vergelykenis tusschen de blinden en stom-dooven*. Roeselare: De Brauwer-Stock; Carton, C.L. (1837-1839) *Le sourd-muet et l'aveugle*. Bruges: Vandecasteele-Werbrouck; Hartmann, A. (1817) *De l'état de l'aveugle-né, comparé à celui du sourd-muet, soit qu'on les suppose l'un et l'autre isolés et abandonnés à eux-mêmes sur une île déserte, soit qu'ils se trouvent au milieu de leurs concitoyens dans l'indigence au dans l'aisance*. Brussels: P. J. de Mat.

<sup>63</sup> Abbe Montaigne (1847) *Recherches sur les connaissances intellectuelles des sourds-muets, considérés par rapport à l'administration des sacremens*. Leuven: Fonteyn; Van Leempoel, V. (1864) *De l'admission des sourds-muets et des aveugles dans les écoles primaires*. Brussels: Thiry-Van Buggenhoudt; De Haerne, D.P.A. (1865) *De l'enseignement spécial des sourds-muets, considéré, dans les méthodes principales, d'après la tradition et le progrès*. Brussels: Devaux; Hirsch, D. (1868) *L'enseignement des sourds-muets d'après la methode Allemande (methode-Amman), introduit en Belgique...* Rotterdam: Vyt.

outside Belgium, raising questions about their applicability to the specific research context.

These nineteenth-century publications mainly reveal how deaf individuals were perceived from a *top-down* perspective, by scientists and benefactors for whom the deaf were either a subject of research or pity. However, I found more everyday points of view in the collection of digitized newspapers of the Royal Library (Brussels) and the online newspaper collection of Aalst (“Made in Aalst”).

The digitization project of the Royal Library currently provides digital access to 71 Belgian newspapers. The oldest newspaper dates back to 1831, the most recent newspaper is from 1970. Through Optical Character Recognition (OCR) it is possible to search the newspapers on the basis of keywords. The downside is that it is not possible to search across all newspapers over time. This means that I had to enter a set of keywords (“*sourd-muet*”, “*sourds-muets*”, “*sourdes-muettes*”, “*doofstom(men)*”) for each year for each newspaper separately. Based on the time frame of this research, I selected all the newspapers which appeared in print before 1925. There were 41 newspapers, spanning the whole of Belgium and all political and ideological factions, which met this criterion. The aim was not to provide a comprehensive overview of the total number of articles addressing deafness or deaf individuals. The large quantity of such articles would have made this undertaking too time-consuming. Instead, the emphasis was on the different types of articles and the discourse used by the reporters as a reflection of the perception of deaf people. Over 1000 articles were collected, photographed and organized in a MS Excel datasheet. Keywords were assigned to the articles based on their subject, so the database is easy to consult. A similar project, but regionally limited to the East Flemish region of Aalst, has digitized 110 newspapers and journals published between 1836 and 1992. The online database enables one to search for articles across all titles and years of publication. I conducted a search based on keywords, which delivered over 400 articles reporting on a deaf individual or an issue regarding deafness.<sup>64</sup>

The impact of newspapers on the perception of their readers is difficult to assess. Moreover, even though access to newspapers underwent a democratization process at the end of the nineteenth century, it is uncertain how many people read newspapers, let alone shared the opinion of the reporters. Nonetheless, newspapers are considered a presentation of public opinion, more so than the sources mentioned above, and as such a rare representation of the views shared by a large part of society. Based on the principles of discourse analysis, newspapers can be used to distil ideas and perceptions of the

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<sup>64</sup> A digital copy of the MS Excel datasheet and the related folders with photographs (classified per newspaper) can be found in the appendix.

hearing regarding the deaf. The factual information in the articles can provide insight into the daily experiences of certain deaf men and women, as well as the way in which their lives were influenced by matters such as legislation, charity and finances. Throughout the different thematic chapters, I present examples of newspaper articles that reflect on the topic being discussed.

## 2.3 Research context

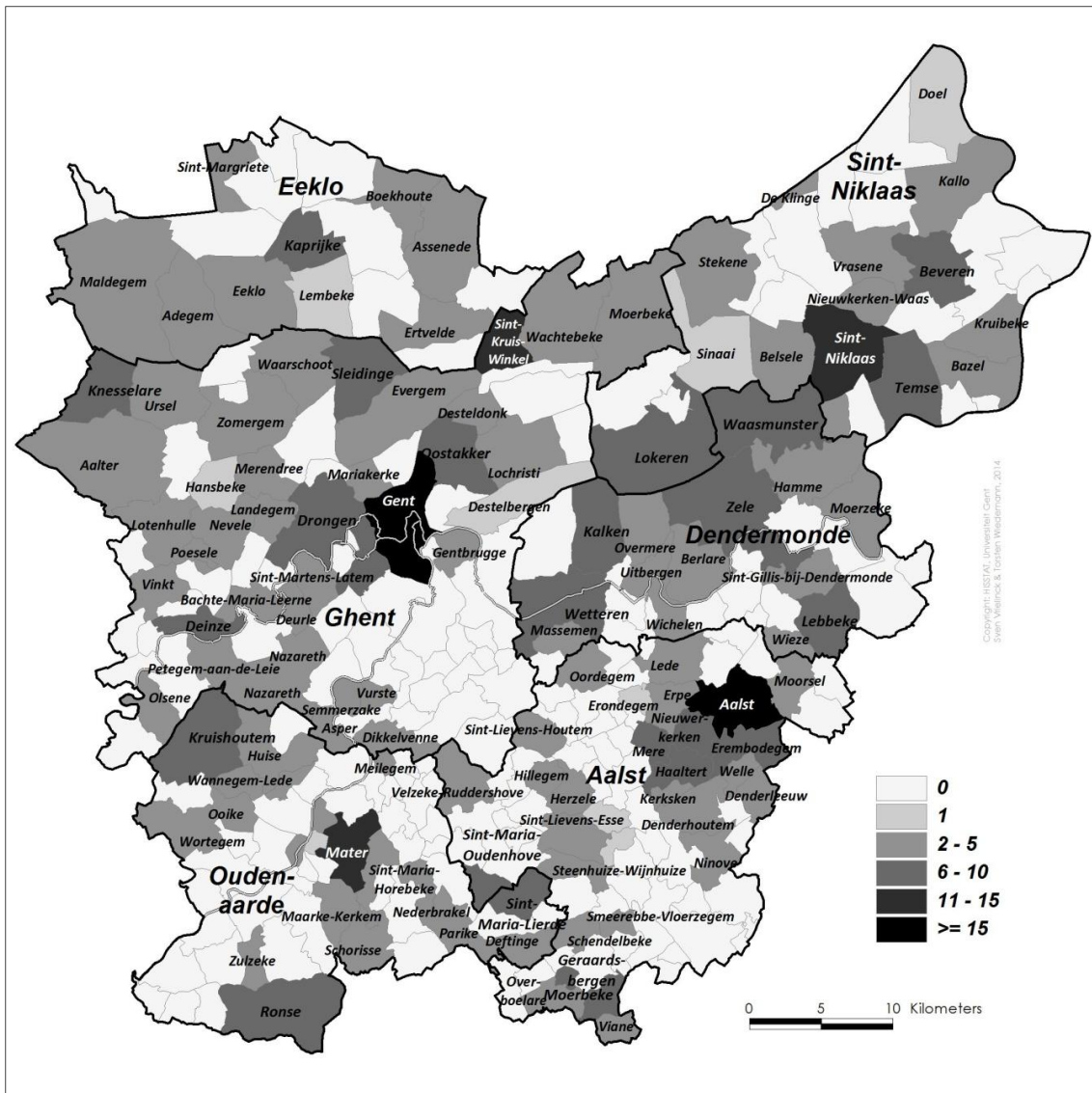
The historical context of this study is the Belgian province of East Flanders and its development from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century. The geographical demarcation of this framework is dependent on the birth places of the research population. The 568 research individuals originate from 128 municipalities, all located in East Flanders and divided across six districts (figure 2.17). The grayscale indicates the number of deaf individuals originating from each municipality (see legend).

Considering the large numbers involved, analysing the research population on a municipal level would have been impractical. Moreover, it is unlikely that the living conditions of people with a hearing impairment differed greatly between neighbouring municipalities. Historical materialist theory suggests that the extent of integration of disabled people is connected to the economic structure of their living environment. Based on this theory, I suggest a division between rural municipalities and urban municipalities in the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century<sup>65</sup>, and a classification according to the level of industrialization (non-industrial, semi-industrial and industrial) for the second half of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century). To determine the level of industrialization on a municipal level, I had to employ the economic sources available in a creative way.

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<sup>65</sup> 82 percent of the deaf in the first birth cohort were born in a rural village. More individuals in the second birth cohort had an urban birthplace (37 percent) – a high number were based in Ghent. The percentage of deaf persons born in a city was lower in the general East Flemish deaf population, as the *Exposé de la situation du Royaume* indicates that about 20 percent of the deaf in 1858 lived in an urban setting. The higher representation of urban households in the dataset is probably the result of the selection of deaf individuals in the matriculation lists of the deaf schools in Ghent. The opportunities for deaf children living in Ghent to attend the deaf schools were most likely better than for deaf children living in a small rural village. The analysis of the residences of the 167 deaf girls who attended the *Institut des Sourdes-Muettes* between 1820 and 1870 (see 2.1.1.4) showed that one in five pupils was born in Ghent (37 percent were born in a city).

**Figure 2.17** Birth places of the deaf research population, East Flanders



Source: LOKSTAT, history department, Ghent University (2014)

Notes: The grayscale indicates the number of deaf individuals originating from each municipality (see legend)

### 2.3.1 Measuring industrialization

While the prominent role of Ghent in the early industrialization of Belgium has prompted many historical studies into the development of Ghent and its immediate surroundings, the industrial development of other areas in East Flanders, such as the land of Waas, the land of Aalst and the area of Oudenaarde, has received less attention. So when I was developing an industrial classification scheme I was unable to rely on a previously developed typology of less and more industrial regions within East Flanders. An additional difficulty when trying to translate industrial development into a statistically analysable variable is the impact of time. A classification according to industrialization is inevitably variable over time, with an increasing number of industrialized localities as

the nineteenth century advances. Thus in order to develop an accurate scale of industrialization, I needed sources that provide information about employment on a regular basis. Moreover, as I wanted to measure industrialization on a municipal level, I required sources indicating industrial activities on a municipal level. This requirement had far-reaching implications for the source material that I could use.

As part of a general statistical development, the *Commission Centrale de Statistique* organized five agricultural and industrial censuses in the nineteenth century: in 1846, 1866, 1880, 1895 and 1896. These censuses are the most important aggregate sources documenting employment. Information on employment can also be found in population censuses, as they record occupations. However, as De Brabandere states, the population censuses are unsuitable for an economic classification of regions because of four main problems. First, the censuses hinder a sectoral approach as they only record the occupations themselves. As many occupations, e.g. labourer, servant and engineer, cannot easily be assigned to a specific professional sector, the censuses do not allow an accurate study of employment. Second, the occupations that are recorded are usually very vague. The census of 1846 records 466,261 “*journaliers et ouvriers sans profession déterminée*” (day labourers and workers without a fixed occupation), which comprises one-quarter of the economically active population of the time. In the case of precisely defined occupations, moreover, it is not certain whether the recorded occupation was the person’s main occupation. People in the nineteenth century often had multiple jobs, which were not all registered. Many people also alternated periods of unemployment with periods of employment, as part of high occupational mobility. In the censuses, therefore, many unemployed registrants registered their previous occupation, leading to an under-registration of unemployment (third problem). Finally, De Brabandere discusses the hidden interregional mobility between living and working areas.<sup>66</sup>

The agricultural and especially industrial censuses are therefore more suited to a study of employment. However, I could not use the censuses of 1846, 1866 and 1880 for two reasons. The first reason, as outlined by De Brabandere, is their poor quality and lack of representativeness as some forms of employment are under-represented. Moreover, the census of 1866 remained unpublished, which renders the census inaccessible. Secondly, and most importantly, the censuses aggregate data on a district level. This makes it impossible to determine the economical profile of individual municipalities. The censuses of 1895 and 1896 are the first censuses that allow an accurate measurement of employ-

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<sup>66</sup> De Brabander, G. (1984) *De regionaal-sectoriële verdeling van de economische activiteit in België: 1846-1979: een kritische studie van het bronnenmateriaal*. Leuven: Nauwelaerts.

ment on a municipal level. Moreover, the census of 1896 is the first to distinguish between employment in proto-industry and other industrial activities.<sup>67</sup>

Based on the industrial census of 1896 and the agricultural census in 1895, I could calculate the number of inhabitants in each municipality that were employed in agriculture, in the total secondary sector (industrial activities) and in the domestic cottage industry, as a specific type of industrial activity.<sup>68</sup> Industrialization processes are also reflected in the increasing importance of the trade and transport sector and services. Unfortunately, the census provides no information on the incidence of these types of employment.

By subtracting the number of individuals engaged in the domestic cottage industry from the total number of individuals employed in the industrial sector, I had an indication of the number of individuals employed in a non-homebound industrial enterprise. Caution is required, however, as this number should be considered a maximum. Individuals working at home, but outside the proto-industry system, are also included.<sup>69</sup> By comparing the number obtained to the population employed in agriculture, I had an indication of the level of industrialization. In the classification, I assumed that municipalities in which industrial activities exceeded agriculture were more industrial than municipalities in which agriculture was still the dominant type of employment. Based on the ratio of individuals *employed in industry* to those *employed in agriculture*, I have devised three categories of industrialization. Municipalities in which the number of industrial workers exceeds the number of farmers are considered *industrial*. Municipalities in which the number of industrial workers represents 65 to 99 percent of the number of farmers are labelled *semi-industrial*. All other municipalities, in which agriculture is the obvious occupational sector, are *non-industrial*. I applied this classification scheme to all municipalities mentioned in sources from 1850 onwards. Born between 1830 and 1860, the research individuals of the second birth cohort generally come of age, enter into marriage, start their occupational career and die after 1850. Research individuals of the first birth cohort too could be alive in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>70</sup>

The question arises as to what extent my typology applies to the whole of the second half of the nineteenth century – as the classification scheme starts more than 40 years

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<sup>67</sup> Proto-industrial employment is considered inclusive for people with impairments as opposed to industrial activities located outside the household (see 2.3.1).

<sup>68</sup> Many thanks to Sven Vrielinck and the Lokstat programme for providing me with the census data for East Flanders and the fruitful suggestions.

<sup>69</sup> As they work at home, they are assumed to be still able to provide for the care of disabled family members.

<sup>70</sup> Before 1850, all municipalities are considered *non-industrial*. Nonetheless, combining all the municipalities in the analysis would cover up the existing differences in employment structure between cities and villages. For that reason, I distinguish between rural and urban municipalities.



before the drawing up of the census. The municipalities that were *non-industrial* in 1896 were definitely non-industrial in the period preceding the census. The *industrial* municipalities, with a larger number of industrial labourers and farmers, achieved this occupational structure through developments in previous decennia, and can therefore be considered to have been industrial in the second half of the nineteenth century. More debatable are the *semi-industrial* municipalities. At which point did they become semi-industrialized (over 65 percent), and can they already be considered semi-industrial in the second half of the nineteenth century? These are pressing questions. By taking into account a 15 percent margin (65 percent instead of 50 percent), I have tried to take this problem into account. In an ideal situation, information about the ratio of individuals employed in industry to those employed in agriculture could be calculated at several points in time – showing the different stages of industrialization through time. However, as 1896 is the first benchmark available I had to apply a more rudimentary distinction.

The following subsections describe the economic (2.3.2) and demographic (2.3.3) characteristics of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century East Flanders. In this period, East Flanders underwent a transition from a period of economic boom and relatively high standards of living in the eighteenth century to a period of crisis in the nineteenth century, characterised by increased labour input and restricted demographic behaviour. Special attention is paid to the timing and diffusion of the transition as this demonstrates the grounds for the distinction between the two birth cohorts and the classification of municipalities into urban/rural areas and according to levels of industrialization.

2.3.4 looks into the medical infrastructure of East Flanders. According to historical materialist theory, medicalization was the second crucial nineteenth-century development, besides industrialization, that negatively affected people with disabilities. The growing impact of medicine and medicalization in the nineteenth century led to the perception that people with disabilities were suffering from a medical condition, which made them ‘different’ from the non-disabled. Labelled as ‘not normal’, people with disabilities were regarded by medical experts as needing care and control.

### 2.3.2 Economic development

Early modern Flanders was characterized by what economics historian F. Mendels called an economic system of *proto-industry* or *pre-industrial industry*.<sup>71</sup> Historians Sheilagh Ogilvie and Marcus Cerman define proto-industrialization as “*the name given to the expansion of domestic industries producing goods for non-local markets which took place in many parts of Europe between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries.*”<sup>72</sup> Such industries mainly developed in the countryside, where they were pursued alongside agriculture. In Flanders, as in many other regions, the textile industry played the most significant role. According to historian Chris Vandenbroeke, employment levels in domestic industries in Flanders were the highest in early modern Europe.<sup>73</sup> Thousands of men, women and children in the Flemish countryside were engaged as home workers in the linen industry, constituting more than half the economically active population by the end of the eighteenth century. The most important concentration of linen workers in East Flanders was to be found in the districts of Ghent, Aalst and Oudenaarde (see figure 2.18).<sup>74</sup> Nonetheless, proto-industrial activities generally constituted only a part-time job. In contrast to countries such as Britain, where full-time wage labourers were not at all unusual, in Flanders the majority of people still owned a piece of land. Full-time weavers and spinners only appeared in Flanders after the middle of the nineteenth century. This implies that people primarily relied on agriculture to earn an income, while rural industry was seen as a way to supplement the family income.<sup>75</sup> A typical early modern Flemish farm was both self-supporting, by producing crops and breeding livestock on a small scale for food as well as growing flax as a commodity for the linen industry, and market-oriented, by selling surplus crops and linen on local, regional, and in the case of linen, even (in-

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<sup>71</sup> Mendels, F. (1969) *Industrialization and Population Pressure in Eighteenth-Century Flanders*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin (unpublished PhD dissertation).

<sup>72</sup> Ogilvie, S.C. & Cerman, M. (1996) *European Proto-Industrialization*. New York, Cambridge University Press, 1.

<sup>73</sup> Vandenbroeke, C. (1987) “The Regional Economy of Flanders and Industrial Modernization in the Eighteenth Century: A Discussion” *The Journal of European Economic History*, 16/1, 149-68. Also see: Van der Wee, H. & D’Haeseleer, p. (1996) “Proto-Industrialization in South-Eastern Flanders. The Mendels Hypothesis and the Rural Linen Industry in the Land van Aalst During the 18th and 19th Centuries” In: Leboutte, R. (ed.) *Proto-industrialisation. Recherches récentes et nouvelles perspectives. Mélanges en souvenir de Franklin Mendels*. Genève: Centre d’histoire économique internationale de l’Université de Genève, 243-62.

<sup>74</sup> Vandenbroeke, C. (1985) “De linnennijverheid” In: Jaspers, L. & Stevens, C. (eds.) *Arbeid en tewerkstelling in Oost-Vlaanderen op het einde van het Ancien Regime: een socio-professionele en demografische analyse*. Ghent: Provinciebestuur Oost-Vlaanderen, 120-8.

<sup>75</sup> Vandenbroeke, C. (1979) “Sociale en conjuncturele facetten van de linnennijverheid in Vlaanderen (14<sup>de</sup>-midden 19<sup>de</sup> eeuw)” *Handelingen der Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent*, 33, 117-74.

ter)national markets.<sup>76</sup> This focus beyond regional markets constitutes an important difference with the products manufactured by craftsmen, who dominated the urban labour market and primarily focused on local sales.<sup>77</sup>

**Table 2.10** Occupational structure of East Flanders, 1796, in %

Occupation type	Rural	Urban	Ghent
Agriculture	39.4	10.4	3.3
Unskilled labour	18.5	17.3	7.8
Textile	15.9	15.3	13.5
Crafts	11.1	23.5	29.5
Trade and transport	4.2	12.1	13.2
Service sector	3	7	6.9
Non-productives	8	15.9	25.7
<i>Total</i> <sup>78</sup>	100	100	100

Source: Jaspers & Stevens (1985) *Arbeid en tewerkstelling in Oost-Vlaanderen*, 92.

This dominant pattern of employment is reflected in the quantitative data available for late eighteenth-century East Flanders. Starting from the 1796 population census, De Belder, Jaspers, Stevens and Vandenbroeke have mapped out the labour and employment characteristics of East Flanders at the end of the Early Modern Period.<sup>79</sup> Table 2.10 shows the percentages of individuals for whom an occupation was listed in the census (=100 percent), arranged in seven occupational sectors (based on the typology of De Belder and others). *Crafts* includes people working in wood and construction, food, clothing and other crafts.<sup>80</sup> People working in the *service sector* are those employed in the judicial system, police, medicine, education and religion, among others. The *non-productives* groups together persons of independent means, the unemployed and those with an undetermined occupational status.

Table 2.10 illustrates the differences between rural areas, urban areas and the city of Ghent, indicating the importance of distinguishing between different areas in the analy-

<sup>76</sup> Thoen, E. & Vanhaute, E. (1999) "The 'Flemish Husbandry' at the Edge: the Farming System on Small Holdings in the Middle of the 19th century" In: Thoen, E & Van Bavel, B. (eds.) *Land Productivity and Agro-Systems in the North Sea Area (Middle Ages-20<sup>th</sup> Century). Elements for Comparison*. Turnhout: Brepols, 271-96.

<sup>77</sup> Vandenbroeke, C. (1985) "De linnennijverheid", 120.

<sup>78</sup> The actual sum of the percentages is a little lower or higher than 100 due to a rounding off of the percentages. I took the percentages as given by Jaspers and Stevens.

<sup>79</sup> Source: Jaspers, L. & Stevens, C. (1985) *Arbeid en tewerkstelling in Oost-Vlaanderen*, 92. Some critical remarks about this reconstruction are discussed in the introductory sections.

<sup>80</sup> Textile manufacturing is considered a type of craft as well, but here it is classified in a separate category because of its significance in the proto-industrial economy.

sis. Agriculture was the most important employment sector in the countryside. In the provincial cities, one-quarter of the population was engaged in crafts, in the city of Ghent that percentage rose to almost one-third. Employment in trade and transport as well as the service sector was also better represented in the cities. Research has shown how the prevalence of these services was correlated to population size, which explains the different occupational structure of the cities. Unskilled labour, in comparison to many other Flemish regions at that time, was of less importance<sup>81</sup>, and those registered as day labourers were almost exclusively involved in the cultivation of farmlands as a way of supplementing their income. Employment in textile manufacturing, on the other hand, largely exceeded the percentages in other regions.<sup>82</sup> As mentioned above, the combination of mixed farms and textile manufacturing was typical for the East Flemish commercial survival economy, which was dominated by small self-supporting farms and home-based linen industries.

Besides these general characteristics, differences between regions within the province of East Flanders can be discerned. East Flanders can be divided into two economically different regions or *social agrosystems*. The idea of social agrosystems was conceptualized by Erik Thoen in 2004, as an elaboration of the agrosystem theory of Michael Mitteraur. Thoen defined a social agrosystem as “*a rural production system based on the region-specific social relations involved in the economic reproduction of a given geographical area*”. The concept emphasizes the reciprocity between the geographic and economic components of a rural society, such as soil structure, production method, division of property and labour organization, and social-demographic characteristics such as household structure, marriage patterns and migrations.<sup>83</sup> Previous research has confirmed how the behaviour of

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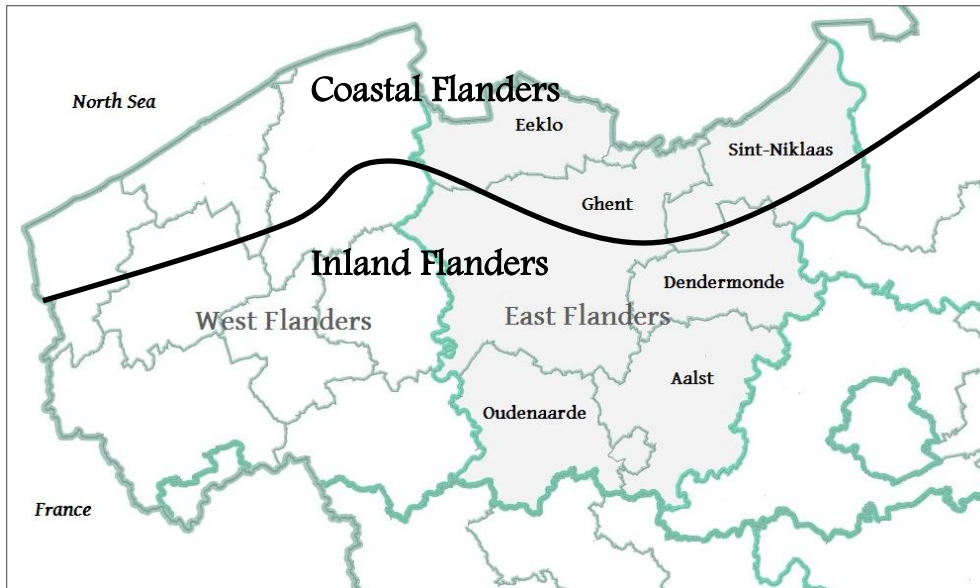
<sup>81</sup> As a point of comparison, I mention the percentages for the district of Ostend (56.7 percent), the area of Veurne-Ambacht (37.9 percent) and the total for West Flemish polder villages (54 percent) – these regions were dominated by large-scale commercial farms. The Pajottenland (26.6 percent), the province of Limburg (24.4 percent) and the district of Antwerp (44 percent) were dominated by a system of small farms. Jaspers, L. & Stevens, C. (1985) *Arbeid en tewerkstelling in Oost-Vlaanderen*, 94.

<sup>82</sup> The district of Ostend (0.7 percent), the area of Veurne-Ambacht (5 percent) and the total for West Flemish polder villages (12 percent: textile and crafts), the Pajottenland (11.1 percent), the province of Limburg (7.2 percent) and the district of Antwerp (6.4 percent). Jaspers, L. & Stevens, C. (1985) *Arbeid en tewerkstelling in Oost-Vlaanderen*, 94.

<sup>83</sup> Thoen, E. (2004) “Social Agrosystems as an Economic Concept to Explain Regional Differences. An Essay Taking the Former County of Flanders as an Example (Middle Ages-19th Century)” In: Van Bavel, B.J.P. & Hoppenbrouwers, P. (eds.) *Landholding and Land Transfer in the North Sea Area (late Middle Ages-19th century)*. Turnhout: Brepols, 47-66.

people depended on the social agrosystem they lived in.<sup>84</sup> Flanders has been divided into a coastal and inland social agrosystem (figure 2.18).

**Figure 2.18** Coastal and inland Flanders



Source: based on Thoen, E. (2001) "A 'Commercial Survival Economy' in Evolution"

Coastal Flanders, which stretches across the north of West and East Flanders, is characterized by wet and fertile polders. Inland Flanders, which covers the main part of East Flanders, consists of areas with sandy and sandy loamy soils. As a result of this different soil structure, different systems of cultivation came to characterize the two regions. The northern coastal area was characterized by large commercial farms, owned by urban entrepreneurs and cultivated by farm labourers. This is reflected in the generally lower number of farmers (owners) and larger number of unskilled labourers in the districts of Eeklo and Sint-Niklaas. By contrast, inland Flanders was dominated by small farm holdings owned by tenants. As a result, a higher number of farmers was registered in the inland districts (Ghent, Aalst and Dendermonde). The smallholdings were part of a commercial survival economy, characterized by a combination of intensive farming and a market-oriented home-based linen industry. The west and southwest of East Flanders

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<sup>84</sup> For example, Devos, De Langhe and Matthys have shown how the social agrosystem significantly affected the livelihood strategies of (unmarried) women in three agrosystems in the Liberty of Bruges. De Langhe, S. (2013) *Oude vrijsters*; De Langhe S., Devos, I. & Matthys, C. (2013) *Survival Strategies of Single Women in the Bruges Countryside, 1814*. Ghent: EED working paper series.

(districts of Ghent and Oudenaarde) formed the centre of the linen industry, and had the highest number of textile manufacturers.<sup>85</sup>

Despite the general fragmentation of farmland in the province, especially in inland Flanders, agricultural yields were never higher than at the end of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century. Refinement of the mixed farming system of land and livestock and increasingly higher labour input resulted in increased productivity, enabling households to maintain a balance between having sufficient yields to feed the family and enough surplus to sell at the market. An increase in productivity was, moreover, boosted by a population growth of 75 percent in the already densely inhabited Flemish region (see 2.3.3).<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the tide began to turn, putting an end to the relative prosperity of the East Flemish countryside. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the textile sector lost the “*commercial battle against mechanized cotton and linen production*”.<sup>87</sup> The establishment of steam-driven machines in urban factories and the import of cheap foreign cotton slashed the price of linen. As a result, rural home workers could no longer compete, and they either became unemployed or under pressure to produce more to earn the same wage. Many home workers responded with increased labour input, longer working days and the mobilization of all family members. Flanders went into a downward spiral of self-exploitation and falling spending power. In 1800 the income per capita in Flanders was 40 percent lower than 50 years earlier.<sup>88</sup> Simultaneously, the rising population pressure and reduced income from textile manufacturing fuelled a continued high demand for land. As a result, farmlands experienced an even higher fragmentation and land prices went up. As plots of farmland became smaller and more expensive, people were driven back to the linen industry to supplement their income, only to end up with an even lower standard of living. As the agricultural yields were no longer sufficient for the growing population, food prices went up. The level of population growth could only be

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<sup>85</sup> An overview of the occupational structure according to district and urban municipality, with each district having a population size of over 5000 inhabitants, can be consulted in the appendix.

<sup>86</sup> A detailed analysis of the agricultural developments in East Flanders in the first half of the nineteenth century can be found in: Kint, P. (1989) *Prometheus aangevuurd door Demeter. De economische ontwikkeling van de landbouw in Oost-Vlaanderen 1815-1850*. Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij.

<sup>87</sup> Vanhaute, E. (2007) “‘So Worthy an Example to Ireland’. The Subsistence and Industrial Crisis of 1845-1850 in Flanders” In: O Gràda, C. (ed.) *When the Potato failed: Causes and Effects of the Last European Subsistence Crisis, 1845-1850*. Turnhout: Brepols, 133.

<sup>88</sup> Vandenbroeke, C. (1981) *Sociale geschiedenis van het Vlaamse volk*. Beveren: Orion, 23.

sustained by the import of grain and switching to the cultivation of potatoes on a larger scale.<sup>89</sup>

This agricultural system came under increasing pressure, reaching the limits of its capacity in the middle of the nineteenth century. The decline of the proto-industry, the unsustainable population growth and increasing food and land prices coincided with an agricultural crisis caused by failing potato harvests in the years 1845-1850. This led to severe impoverishment of the Flemish countryside, prompting many sources to talk about “poor Flanders”.<sup>90</sup> Vermeersch calculated that in 1850 about 23.4 percent of the East Flemish rural population was supported by local poor institutions.<sup>91</sup> The falling incomes, intensive labour input and unvaried diet also made people more susceptible to sickness and epidemics.<sup>92</sup>

The decline of traditional Flemish agriculture and rural deindustrialization was accompanied by a process of industrialization, initially instigated by large cities.<sup>93</sup> Belgium was the first industrializing country on the European mainland. The old socio-economic basis, rural society, lost its autonomous vigour and was replaced by new industrial concerns, creating a new dynamic that relied on different, much looser labour. The very high labour input and extremely low wages, could only be compensated for by a looser, more rapidly adaptable society.<sup>94</sup> Industrialization developed first in the Walloon districts around Liège and Charleroi, renowned for their heavy coal and mining industries, and in Flemish cities such as Aalst and Ghent, which specialized in industrial textile

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<sup>89</sup> Scholliers, E. & Vandenbroeke, C. (1981) “Structure en conjuncturen in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden” In: *Nieuwe algemene geschiedenis der Nederlanden*. Haarlem, v.5, 252-310. For an elaborate discussion on the topic see: Hoppenbrouwers, P. & Luiten van Zanden, J. (eds.)(2001) *Peasants into Farmers? The Transformation of Rural Economy and Society in the Low Countries (Middle Ages - 19th Century) in Light of the Brenner Debate*. Turnhout: Brepols; Vanhaute, E., Devos, I. & Lambrecht, T. (eds.)(2011) *Rural Economy and Society in North-Western Europe, 500-2000. Making a Living: Family, Income and Labour*. Turnhout: Brepols.

<sup>90</sup> Vandenbroeke, C. (1987) “The Regional Economy of Flanders”, 150; Vanhaute, E. (2007) “So Worthy an Example to Ireland”; Vandenbroeke, C. (1995) *Hoe rijk was arm Vlaanderen? Vlaanderen in de 18<sup>de</sup> eeuw: een vergelijkend overzicht*. Bruges: Genootschap voor Geschiedenis “Société d’Emulation”.

<sup>91</sup> Vermeersch, N. (2003) *Een vergelijkende studie van de aardappelcrisis in Ierland en Vlaanderen in de periode 1845-1850*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished master’s dissertation), 126-7.

<sup>92</sup> Devos, I. (1998) “Ziekte: een harde realiteit” In: De Maeyer, J. (ed.) *Er is leven voor de dood. Tweehonderd jaar gezondheidszorg in Vlaanderen*. Kapellen: Pelckmans, 117-29.

<sup>93</sup> The development of modern industries did not automatically imply the end of the cottage industry. Up until the First World War, part of the urban textile production was done by rural homeworkers. Bracke, N. (2003) “Spinnerijen van vlas, van werk, van hennep, van jute, weverijen, blekerijen en andere nijverheden’ 19<sup>e</sup>-eeuwse industriële ontwikkelingen in Oost-Vlaanderen en Lokeren” *Annalen van de Koninklijke Oudheidkundige Kring van het Land van Waas*, 106, 161-78.

<sup>94</sup> Vanhaute, E. (2003) “Bevolking, arbeid en inkomen” In: Art, J. & Vanhaute, E. (eds.) *Inleiding tot de lokale geschiedenis van de 19<sup>de</sup> en 20<sup>ste</sup> eeuw*. Ghent: Stichting Mens en Cultuur.

manufacture. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Ghent became the indisputable industrial leader on the European mainland. Despite turbulent political changes (French rule succeeded by Dutch rule, and the battle for the independence of Belgium in 1830), Ghent blossomed as a modern pioneer. In 1810, 18 cotton mills, 20 cotton weaving mills and 21 cotton printers employed nearly 11,000 labourers. Industriousness and diligence became the norms of modern society and structured social set-ups such as poor relief and prisons, which helped in the recruitment of cheap labourers.<sup>95</sup> In the second half of the nineteenth century, the city's employment opportunities attracted many inhabitants from the surrounding countryside, looking for a way out of their economic hardship.

For a large part of the nineteenth century, however, the impact of the industrial *revolution* in Belgium was limited to urbanized regions. The impact of the industrial revolution in Flanders was only strongly felt, especially in the countryside, towards the end of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the labour market underwent important changes. Cheap and unskilled labour replaced the declining proto-industry and became increasingly available in the course of the century, resulting in a growing wage-earning working class. Simultaneously, the percentage of people working in the manufacturing industries (*secondary* sector) and service sector (*tertiary* sector) increased steadily. Occupational mobility increased as more people commuted, mostly to the cities, and travelling over longer distances became easier.<sup>96</sup>

Tables 2.11 and 2.12 illustrate the changes in employment in agriculture, the home-based textile industry and other crafts/industries between 1796 and 1896. Based on the published population census of 1796 and the agricultural and industrial censuses of 1895 and 1896, I have calculated how many individuals within the birth places of the research population were employed in agriculture, textile manufacture and crafts/industry, according to district. Table 2.11 presents the percentages for the countryside. Table 2.12 presents the percentages for the provincial cities and Ghent.

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<sup>95</sup> Deneckere, G. (2010) "Stad van industrie en arbeid" In: Boone, M. & Deneckere, G. (eds.) *Gent: Stad van alle tijden*. Ghent: Mercatorfonds, 149.

<sup>96</sup> Vanhaute, E. (2003) "Bevolking, arbeid en inkomen".



**Table 2.11** Occupational structure of East Flemish countryside, 1796-1896, in %

District	Agriculture		Textile		Crafts/Industry	
	1796	1895/6	1796	1895/6	1796	1895/6
Aalst	58.6	50	12.5	20.6	10.8	24.1
Dendermonde	56.6	40.9	9.5	12.3	13.3	27.8
Eeklo	57.6	73.9	16.7	0.9	13.2	13.9
Ghent	59.6	56.6	16.3	4.7	10.4	23.1
Oudenaarde	39.1	54.6	37.4	15.2	11.7	20.4
Sint-Niklaas	57.9	37.3	8.5	5.4	17	23.7

Source: 1796 population census, 1895 agricultural census and 1896 industrial census

Notes: Only the municipalities within each district in which a deaf person was born – and not all municipalities within the district are taken into account. From top to bottom: N=14, 13, 3, 32, 11 and 6 municipalities.

Table 2.11 illustrates the gradual character of the industrialization in the Flemish countryside. Taking Belgium as a whole, in 1900 27 percent of the men and women were employed in agriculture as opposed to about 50 percent in 1796. Nonetheless, in the majority of the East Flemish districts, agriculture remained the most important type of employment. Conversely, in all the districts, except for Aalst and Dendermonde, the home-based textile industry experienced a significant decline. This decline accompanied a general rise in employment in *crafts*, which in 1895/6 comes under *industry*. The rise in the number of people engaged in industrial activities points to a shift towards an industrialized economy.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>97</sup> The interpretation of table 2.11 is hindered by three differences between the 1796 and 1895/6 censuses. First, female employment was under-represented in the 1796 census. By counting the number of women between 15 and 64 years (economically active) and the number of recorded female occupations for each municipality, I estimated that an occupation was recorded for on average 10 percent of the women. Most of these women were engaged in farming work and linen manufacturing, suggesting the percentages in the 1796 *agriculture* and *textile* columns should be considered minimum values. Secondly, the censuses apply a different classification scheme for employment. In the 1796 census, occupations in trade and transport are grouped under one category, separate from crafts, and therefore these types of occupations are not included in table 2.11. The 1895/6 industrial census treats transport as part of industrial employment, while employment in trade is not recorded. So the content of *crafts/industry* is slightly different for the 1796 and 1895/6 populations. Thirdly, in 1796 the vast majority of day labourers in the countryside were employed in agriculture, so I classified them in the column *agriculture*. In the 1895/6 industrial census, it is not possible to distinguish between labourers and craftsmen – only between those working in domestic industries and those who were not. As a result, in 1796 we have a larger number of people working in agriculture, and in 1895/6 a larger number working in crafts/industry.

**Table 2.12** Occupational structure of East Flemish provincial cities, 1796–1896, in %

City	Agriculture		Textile		Crafts/Industry	
	1796	1895/6	1796	1895/6	1796	1895/6
Aalst	11.6	10.1	3.9	6.1	21.5	45.3
Deinze	14.3	17.4	12.8	6.4	26.3	37.2
Dendermonde	6.1	4.7	9.4	1.5	20.8	37.9
Eeklo	9.8	22.9	25.2	9.1	21.8	39.1
Geraardsbergen	3.8	2.3	17.2	10.8	26.7	49.2
Lokeren	19	24.8	17.8	4.9	21.2	39
Ninove	11.7	9.3	14.9	11.5	37.7	47.9
Oudenaarde	3.3	2.3	1.8	2.4	31.9	33.5
Ronse	11.2	13.3	40.3	26.4	11.4	31.3
Sint-Niklaas	13.1	8.8	10.2	12	16.4	44
Ghent	4	1.2	14	2.6	28	45.8

Source: 1796 population census, 1895 agricultural census and 1896 industrial census

I did the same calculations for the urban municipalities in the database. Table 2.12 shows that the provincial towns acquired a more industrial character in the course of the nineteenth century, though not always to the same extent. In most of the cities agricultural occupations decreased, but not in all cases and not always substantially. The same observation applies to the decreasing importance of domestic industrial activities. A more clear-cut development in the towns is the rise in industrial employment, with almost a doubling in all the cities. All the cities are considered to be industrial after 1850, as the importance of industrial employment exceeds agrarian activities (agriculture and home-based textile industries) in all cases.

The last quarter of the nineteenth century saw the start of a new phase of economic transformation. The exhaustive model of the nineteenth century was slowly abandoned for a more regulated model, which dominated the twentieth century. High participation rates made way for relatively low but more permanent employment. In return, the government took responsibility for a large part of social security. The higher value of labour translated into higher pay, more social protection and more and more regulated and segmented labour markets. Better survival and employment prospects and government-guaranteed social security securities translated into increasing investments in family life and family members.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Vanhaute, E. (2003) “Bevolking, arbeid en inkomen”.

### 2.3.3 Demographic behaviour<sup>99</sup>

Between 1750 and 1850 the Belgian population almost doubled in size. The provinces of West and East Flanders started early in this process, growing by almost 30 percent in the period 1700-1750. Except in the province of Hainaut in the Walloon area, this growth rate was unseen in early modern Southern Netherlands.<sup>100</sup> By 1846, the Flemish region had 1.43 million inhabitants and a population density of 233 inhabitants per square kilometre.<sup>101</sup> In Flanders, the population increased the most spectacularly in sandy areas dominated by a home-based textile industry (more than 50 percent), while the growth rate in more agriculturally orientated coastal regions was limited to a 'mere' 30 to 40 percent.<sup>102</sup> Vandenbroeke, Vanhaute and others have related these differences across the regions to the success of the commercial survival economy, and emphasized the exclusiveness of the population growth to the countryside. While 15 percent of the East Flemish population lived in the city of Ghent in 1700, Ghent represented only 8 percent of the population by the second half of the eighteenth century. These figures clearly point to a trend of *ruralization*.

The population growth can be related to a general mortality decrease from the eighteenth century onwards, as part of a demographic process that entailed the transition from high to low birth and death rates – the so-called *demographic transition*. Simultaneously life expectancy started to increase from about 30 to 35 years at birth in the Early Modern Period to 80 years today.<sup>103</sup> The mortality decline cannot be understood as a linear process, but consisted of two main phases. A first decline took place in the eighteenth century and was characterized by a decrease of mortality peaks and a general improvement of survival chances, especially for children. The decline ended with the start of the economic crisis and the process of industrialization in the early nineteenth century. Precarious living and hygienic conditions, bad nutrition and long working hours,

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<sup>99</sup> A comprehensive overview of demographic developments in relation to economic opportunities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (and before) can be found in: Vanhaute, E., Devos, I. & Lambrecht, T. (eds.) (2011) *Rural Economy and Society*.

<sup>100</sup> Klep, P. (1991) "Population Estimates of Belgium by Province (1375-1831)" In: *Historiens et Populations. Liber Amicorum Etienne Hélin*. Louvain-la-Neuve: Academia, 505.

<sup>101</sup> Vanhaute, E. (2007) "So Worthy an Example to Ireland". In 1796 the East Flemish countryside had 158 inhabitants per square km. At the time, it was one of the most densely populated areas in Europe. Jaspers, C. & L. Stevens (1985) *Arbeid en tewerkstelling in Oost-Vlaanderen*, 39.

<sup>102</sup> Vandenbroeke, C. (1984) "Le cas Flamand: evolution sociale et comportements démographiques aux XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles" *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 39/5, 918.

<sup>103</sup> The low life expectancy in the eighteenth century does not imply that people living in the past did not reach old age. However, death did strike harder at all ages and the disproportionate number of infant and childhood deaths eroded life expectancy rates.

in combination with the limited medical knowledge of the period, made mortality rates skyrocket again.<sup>104</sup> East- and West-Flanders were struck the hardest – not coincidentally linen-dominated regions, characterized by a high population density. Weakened by economic hardship and living closely together, the Flemish population suffered severely from the typhoid and cholera epidemics which struck the region in the late 1840s. From the 1880s onwards, a second and irreversible mortality decline started, resulting in a substantial increase in longevity among all age groups. At the turn of the century life expectancy in Belgium had increased to 44.9 years for men, 48.7 years for women.<sup>105</sup>

The mortality decline went hand in hand with changes in the main causes of death, often referred to as the *epidemiological transition*.<sup>106</sup> While most people in the Early Modern Period died of infectious diseases, transmitted through nutrition, water or insects – like typhoid, dysentery and malaria –, respiratory diseases – like tuberculosis – became the most important cause of death at the end of the nineteenth century. The second phase of mortality decline was paralleled by a disappearance of infectious diseases in favour of degenerative chronic diseases, as cancer and cardiovascular diseases. The shift from infectious diseases to chronic deceases implied a transition in the age group with the highest mortality rates from children to elderly people.<sup>107</sup>

The mortality decline has been related to improvements within among other things medical knowledge, living standards, nutrition, housing conditions and public hygiene.<sup>108</sup> Historian Isabelle Devos, in her study into mortality and morbidity in eight-

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<sup>104</sup> Depauw and Devos have plotted the life expectancy rates for people living in the cities of Antwerp, Bruges, Ghent and in Belgium (1846-1900). The graph clearly shows a decrease in life expectancy in the middle of the century, with Belgian life expectancy rates declining from about 41 years in 1856 to 32 years in 1866. By 1880, life expectancy rates had increased again to about 42 years. Depauw, E. & Devos, I. (2014) *Urban Health Penalties. Estimates of Life Expectancies in Belgian Cities, 1846-1900*. Unpublished conference paper presented at the European Society of Historical Demography Conference, Alghero.

<sup>105</sup> Devos, I. (2006) *Allemaal beestjes. Mortaliteit en morbiditeit in Vlaanderen, 18de-20ste Eeuw*. Ghent: Academia Press, 29.

<sup>106</sup> The Egyptian physician Abdel Omran was the first to introduce this concept in his 1971 article. Omran, A.R. (1971) "The Epidemiological Transition: A Theory of the Epidemiology of Population Change" *Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly*, 29, 509-38.

<sup>107</sup> Devos, I. (2006) *Allemaal beestjes*, 48.

<sup>108</sup> E.g. McKeown, T. & Record, R.G. (1962) "Reasons for the Decline of Mortality in England and Wales During the Nineteenth Century" *Population Studies*, 16, 94-122; McKeown, T., Brown, R.G. & Record, R.G. (1972) "An Interpretation of the Modern Rise of Population in Europe" *Population Studies*, 26/3, 391-422; Mercer, A. (1985) "Smallpox and Epidemiological-Demographic Change in Europe: The Role of Vaccination" *Population Studies*, 287-307; Fogel, R.W. (1986) "Nutrition and the Decline in Mortality since 1700: Some Preliminary Findings" In: Engerman, S.L. & Gallman, R.E. (eds.) *Long-term Factors in American Economic Growth*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Szreter, S. (1988) "The Importance of Social Intervention in Britain's Mortality Decline, 1850-1914" *Social History of Medicine*, 1, 1-37; Devos, I. (2006) *Allemaal beestjes*.

eenth- and nineteenth-century Flanders, downplayed the positive correlation between living standards and increased life expectancy and enfeebled the importance of an improved nutrition for the decline in mortality. More importantly, according to Devos, were the efforts of the authorities to improve public hygiene. In the first phase of the mortality decline, hygienic improvements were carried out on a local level, resulting in a small but distinct improvement of survival. Only when the central government, as part of a sanitary movement, increased her investments within public health and hygiene by the end of the nineteenth century, life expectancy experienced the biggest increase. The role of a growing group of medical practitioners in Belgium (paragraph 2.3.4) needs to be mentioned in this regard.

The general mortality decline alone, however, cannot explain the exceptional population increase of Flanders. According to Mendels, the linen industry provided youngsters with the opportunity to accumulate money through wage-earning, and thus with the opportunity to set up a household at a younger age. No longer dependent on the inheritance of land, there was no need to postpone marriage, which inextricably resulted in the birth of more children. As such, Mendels explains the population growth by a younger age at first marriage and an increased natality. Vandenbroeke contradicted Mendels' theory and demonstrated how the Flemish countryside in the eighteenth and nineteenth century was characterized by a pattern of marrying late and never.

This restrictive marriage pattern was the result of the survival of an agrarian mentality that considered the ability to establish oneself autonomously and provide an income as prerequisites for marriage. In an agrarian society, this implied moving in or having a farm.<sup>109</sup> High mortality rates until the eighteenth century ensured a timely passing on of hereditary possessions from parents to children, enabling children to marry. However, from the eighteenth century onwards, as parents started to live longer, the number of young people of marriageable age without short- and medium-term prospects of settling down increased. The continuing fragmentation of farmland, resulting in ever smaller plots with insufficient yields, and the failure of the home-based linen industry in the nineteenth century, in combination with continued population growth, led to an even more restricted attitude towards marriage and children. The already high average age at first marriage in East Flanders further increased to 29 years for men and 27 years for women, and the proportion of men and women that never married increased from

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<sup>109</sup> The West European marriage pattern is associated with an agricultural society and an inheritance system based on a certain amount of property being a prerequisite for marriage. Devos, I. (1999) "Marriage and Economic Conditions since 1700: The Belgian Case" In: Devos, I. & Kennedy, L. (eds.) *Marriage and Rural Economy. Western Europe since 1400*. Turnhout: Brepols, 101.

15 percent around 1800 to an average of more than 25 percent shortly after the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>110</sup>

**Table 2.13** Index of nuptiality in East Flanders, 1699-1890

Period	$I_m$
1699-1703	0.473
1742-1757	0.406
1796	0.420
1802-1812	0.417
1846	0.345
1856	0.303
1866	0.361
1880	0.364
1890	0.395

Source: Vandenbroeke (2004) "Karakteristieken van het huwelijks- en voortplantingspatroon", 209.

Young people faced increasing difficulties in successfully negotiating the marriage market, as shown by the declining *index of the proportion married* ( $I_m$ ) in table 2.13. This index of nuptiality measures the time women of marriageable age (15-50) spent on average in a matrimonial state. Research has indicated that the indices of the different East Flemish districts showed little divergence, negating the positive association between the linen industry and nuptiality.<sup>111</sup> As people married at a later age, the period in which a woman could conceive children within wedlock was shortened by several years, resulting in a lower number of legitimate births. In the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, crude birth rates in East Flanders decreased from around 38 births per 1000 people (‰) to around 25 births in 1920.<sup>112</sup> The postponement of children as a result of restrictive marriage behaviour resulted in an average household in early modern Flanders of around five members.<sup>113</sup> The household size remained constant in the nineteenth century, but the continued rise in age at first marriage led to children staying

<sup>110</sup> E.g. Deprez, P. & Vandenbroeke, C. (1989) "Population Growth and Distribution, and Urbanization in Belgium During the Demographic Transition" In: Lawton, R. & Lee, R. (eds.) *Urban Population Development in Western Europe from the Late-Eighteenth to the Early-Twentieth Century*. Liverpool: University Press, 220-57.

<sup>111</sup> Jaspers, C. & Stevens, L. (1985) *Arbeid en tewerkstelling in Oost-Vlaanderen*, 71.

<sup>112</sup> See: Jaspers, C. & Stevens, L. (1985) *Arbeid en tewerkstelling in Oost-Vlaanderen*, 67. Within marriage the number of births was not restricted: the *marital fertility index*  $I_g$  remained high in the nineteenth century. The  $I_g$  fertility index measures the extent to which a married woman makes use of her natural fertility. The closer the index is to 1, the more natural the fertility (no use of contraception). In nineteenth-century East Flanders the index always exceeded 0.78, with no distinct differences between districts.

<sup>113</sup> Vandenbroeke, C. (1981) *Sociale geschiedenis van het Vlaamse volk*, 33.

longer in the household. It was only at the end of the nineteenth century, parallel with the continuing dismantling of agricultural employment and the breakthrough of an industrial society, that marital restrictions loosened. Young people became economically independent more quickly, encouraging more of them to marry and at a younger age. The gradual breakthrough of contraceptive methods, however, broke the link between nuptiality and natality.

Vandenbroeke does not use mortality, nuptiality or natality to explain the population growth in Flanders, but emphasizes the impact of reduced migration from the countryside to the city in the eighteenth century. According to Vandenbroeke, the period before the eighteenth century was characterized by a substantial emigration from rural areas to the cities, which he called “*villes-tombeaux*”, referring to their zero population growth as a result of high levels of mortality. However, the economic prosperity of the eighteenth-century Flemish countryside, able to provide for the needs of a larger population, reduced the need for a surplus of rural residents to move. As a consequence, at the end of the eighteenth century 92 percent of the East Flemish population lived in rural areas. However, when the rural economy started its structural decline at the beginning of the nineteenth century and rural population growth became unsustainable, the migration towards the cities restarted.<sup>114</sup> As a result, the population growth in the countryside stagnated and the trend of *ruralization* was replaced by increased *urbanization*. The number of urban residents in East Flanders rose from 22.4 percent in 1801 to 26.3 percent in 1846.<sup>115</sup> The relocation away from rural municipalities was particularly strong in districts characterized by textile industries. De Paepe calculated that in the period covering 1845-1859, over 11,000 people migrated out of the textile-orientated rural districts – as opposed to about 4,400 from non-industrial rural districts. The East Flemish cities expanded to over 8,700 residents. Migration also occurred to other provinces, as the general migration balance in East Flanders was negative (- 6,949 inhabitants).<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Vandenbroeke, C. (1984) “Le cas Flamand: évolution sociale et comportements démographiques aux XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles” *Annales Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 39/5, 915-38.

<sup>115</sup> De Paepe, T. (2003) *Oost-Vlaamse mannen met een handicap*.

<sup>116</sup> Roosement, F. (1981) *Sociaal-anthropometrische studie over Oost-Vlaanderen tijdens de eerste helft van de 19de eeuw aan de hand van militieregisters*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished master’s dissertation), 264-5.

### 2.3.4 Medical infrastructure

The high labour productivity and rising food prices in the course of the nineteenth century also affected the physical well-being and health of individuals, both in the countryside and in cities. A restricted diet of cheap carbohydrate-rich foods such as bread and potatoes resulted in vitamin deficiencies, lower resistance and made people more susceptible to disease. Long working hours and intensive working conditions brought about exhaustion and increased risk of injuries. Urban families lived in cramped houses, which generally lacked sanitation and possibilities for personal hygiene.<sup>117</sup>

This general deterioration in well-being coincided with the establishment of a so-called *medicalized* society, which has been defined as the process in which “medicine, health care and the medical profession has established a growing power over ever more spheres of public life and human existence.”<sup>118</sup> According to Karel Velle, the beginning of the medicalization process in Belgium can be placed at the end of the eighteenth century. From that moment onwards, more people came into contact with physicians and the medical sphere and medical practice came to affect a wide range of domains, such as sexuality, birth and death, and the treatment of deviant behaviour.<sup>119</sup> Until the eighteenth century, the medical field was divided up among university-trained physicians, surgeon-barbers, midwives and apothecaries. However, these practitioners had to share their field with ‘healers’, who included wonder doctors, practitioners of the occult and other quacks. Home remedies and folk beliefs were passed down through the generations and medical options were hardly ever considered. However, from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards, the practice of medicine developed to become more rational, specialized and professional.<sup>120</sup> This process started in the highest classes of society at the end of the eighteenth century, with changing attitudes towards medical consumption and personal hygiene. A century later, similar behaviour manifested itself in the middle classes.<sup>121</sup> Simultaneously, the situation of the most disadvantaged in society became a point of medical interest, which contributed to the gradual development of a more general health policy. Until well into the nineteenth century, however, the

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<sup>117</sup> Roosemont, F. (1981) *Sociaal-anthropometrische studie over Oost-Vlaanderen*, 195; Devos, I. (1998) “Ziekte: een harde realiteit”, 117-29.

<sup>118</sup> Juffermans, P.C.(1986) “Medicalisering en zelfzorg in historisch perspectief” *Scripta Medico Philosophica*, 1, 29.

<sup>119</sup> Velle, K. (1991) *De nieuwe biechtvaders. De sociale geschiedenis van de arts in België*. Leuven: Kritak-Meulenhof, 11. For an elaborate discussion on the topic of medicalization, I refer to the extensive publication list of Karel Velle.

<sup>120</sup> Bruneel, C. (1998) “Ziekte en sociale geneeskunde: de erfenis van de verlichting” In: De Maeyer, J. (ed.) *Er is leven voor de dood. Tweehonderd jaar gezondheidszorg in Vlaanderen*. Kapellen: Pelckmans, 17-32; Devos, I. (1998) “Ziekte: een harde realiteit”, 127.

<sup>121</sup> Vandenbroeke, C. (1980) “De medische consumptie sinds de 16e eeuw”.



lower classes themselves regarded illness as an inescapable part of life. The modern and rational beliefs of physicians conflicted with the traditions of the common people, and were regarded with suspicion. In the case of illness, they preferred to seek refuge in devotion and superstition, using rosaries, turning to saints associated with different types of illnesses, or undertaking pilgrimages. Medical help was only called on in emergencies, often when a person's fate was already sealed.<sup>122</sup>

Medicalization finds its most quantifiable expression in the expansion of and improved access to medical care and can be measured by examining a population's medical consumption. Medical consumption is dependent on several factors, such as the availability and proximity of medical practitioners and the cost of a doctor's visit.

The availability of medically trained professionals in the past has been highly correlated to population size, and therefore biased towards the cities. For financial reasons, graduates in medicine preferred to set up a practice in the city. In 1744 the city of Ghent had one physician for every 3408 inhabitants. By the end of the eighteenth century, their number had risen to about 1 for every 1965 inhabitants. In the East Flemish countryside, however, as a doctor stated in 1781 "there [were] no more than twenty educated physicians to be found. Medicine is there practiced by quacks and surgeons without principles."<sup>123</sup> The difference between urban and rural areas in East Flanders at the end of the eighteenth century is illustrated in tables 2.14 and 2.15. The tables show respectively the number of surgeons, physicians and midwives for each rural district and the most important provincial towns based on the 1796 census. In the census, only the main occupation of a person was recorded. As a result, the numbers do not take into account people involved in medical practice on a part-time basis, as was the case for most midwives. The under-registration of occupations for married women also contributes to the low number of midwives in all the districts. The number of surgeons, and especially physicians, can be considered more accurate as they are unlikely to have combined medicine with another occupation.

Comparing tables 2.14 and 2.15 clearly shows the stronger representation of medical practitioners in the cities. The difference between urban and rural areas is mainly the result of a lower number of university-trained physicians in the countryside (0.7 per 1000 inhabitants in the city as opposed to 0.2 in the countryside). Nevertheless, a higher availability of doctors did not automatically result in better health care. Jaspers and Stevens have shown that infant mortality rates were highest in the cities and not necessarily lower in rural regions with a higher number of medical practitioners. For example,

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<sup>122</sup> Bruneel, C. (1998) "Ziekte en sociale geneeskunde"; Devos, I. (1998) "Ziekte: een harde realiteit", 127.

<sup>123</sup> Bruneel, C. (1998) "Ziekte en sociale geneeskunde", 18.

the city of Eeklo with 1.1 practitioners for 1000 inhabitants, had an infant mortality rate of 187‰, while Oudenaarde with only 0.6 practitioners for 1000 inhabitants had a rate of 141‰.

**Table 2.14** Medical practitioners in East Flemish countryside, 1796 (per 1000 inhabitants)

District	Surgeon	Physician	Midwife	Total
Aalst	0.5	0.3	0.04	0.8
Eeklo	0.7	0.3	0.1	1.1
Dendermonde	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.9
Ghent	0.5	0.3	0.1	0.9
Oudenaarde	0.4	0.1	0.1	0.6
Sint-Niklaas	0.5	0.4	0.1	1
East Flanders	0.5	0.2	0.1	0.9

Source: Jaspers & Stevens (1985) *Arbeid en tewerkstelling in Oost-Vlaanderen*, 108.

**Table 2.15** Medical practitioners in East Flemish cities, 1796 (per 1000 inhabitants)

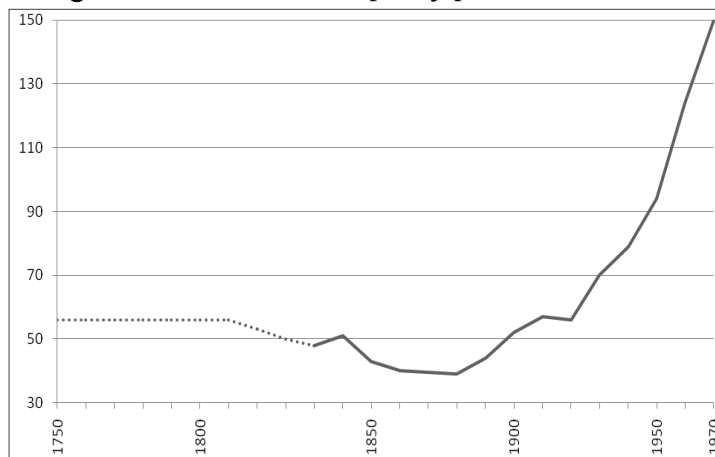
Cities	Surgeon	Physician	Midwife	Total
Aalst	0.4	0.5	0	0.9
Deinze	0.4	1.1	0	1.5
Dendermonde	1.1	1.1	0	2.2
Eeklo	0.4	0.5	0	0.9
Geraardsbergen	0.9	0.9	0.2	2
Lokeren	0.4	0.7	0.6	1.7
Ninove	1.6	1.3	0	2.9
Oudenaarde	0.8	0.8	0.5	2.1
Ronse	0.2	0.6	0	0.8
Sint-Niklaas	0.8	0.6	0.1	1.5
Ghent	0.9	0.6	0.4	1.9
East Flanders	0.9	0.6	0.4	1.9

Source: Jaspers & Stevens (1985) *Arbeid en tewerkstelling in Oost-Vlaanderen*, 107.

Estimates by Vandenbroeke (figure 2.19) show that the availability of medical practitioners remained low in the course of the nineteenth century, only to significantly increase from the 1930s onwards. However, figure 2.19 hides a qualitative change as from

the middle of the nineteenth century more physicians were to be found in the countryside as a result of a blurring between the different types of medical practitioners.<sup>124</sup>

**Figure 2.19** Medical capacity per 100,000 inhabitants, 1750-1970



Source: Vandenbroeke, C. (1980) “De medische konsumptie sinds de 16e eeuw”, 153.

For the lower classes in society, a doctor was not only distant physically, but also intellectually, linguistically and especially financially.<sup>125</sup> Based on account books and wage estimates, Vandenbroeke states that before the middle of the nineteenth century the price of a doctor’s visit constituted about 75 percent of a labourer’s daily wage. Around 1800, access to medical care was even more expensive. The high cost of professional medical care made it less likely for common people to visit physicians and added to the attractiveness of a wide range of more dubious healers. From 1850 onwards, a doctor’s visit became more affordable. Nonetheless, only after the start of the twentieth century did the ratio of the doctor’s fee to the daily wage drop below 50 percent. A visit was more expensive in cities than in the countryside and patients from the lower classes paid about three-quarters of the sum paid by higher class patients.<sup>126</sup> A letter written by the *Comité de Santé* (Health Committee) of Ghent in 1803 confirms that “citizens of little means” benefitted from an adjusted tariff and free health care was provided for the poor.<sup>127</sup> In the course of the nineteenth century, the government became increasingly concerned about the medical and hygienic situation of the poor, admittedly because of fears that they would spread disease rather than out of humanitarian concerns.

<sup>124</sup> Shortly before the middle of the nineteenth century, the medical occupations of doctor, surgeon and obstetrician were united in one function. Vandenbroeke, C. (1980) “De medische konsumptie sinds de 16e eeuw” *Handelingen der Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde*, 34, 143-65.

<sup>125</sup> Bruneel, C. (1998) “Ziekte en sociale geneeskunde”, 18.

<sup>126</sup> 1 guilder = 2.116 Belgian francs.

<sup>127</sup> Gadeyne, G. (1979) “Tarieven voor medische prestaties in Oost-Vlaanderen (1803-1820)” *Annalen Geschied- en Oudheidkundige Kring van Ronse en het tenement van Inde*, 28, 199-215.

Based on the analysis of the medical infrastructure of East Flanders, I am inclined to state that the medicalization of the region was mainly a twentieth-century phenomenon. However, the medicalization process was a gradual process, requiring changes in the minds and acts of people and adjustments in the medical market.<sup>128</sup> These changes are not all directly reflected in the availability and cost of medicine. Qualitative sources indicate a changing attitude towards and increasing interest in health care in the course of the nineteenth century. The number of medical advertisements addressing a range of issues, such as problems with eyes or teeth, mental conditions, colds and venereal diseases, steadily increased from 1750 onwards. So did the number of popular medical publications. In the second half of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, health care passed from religious organizations on a local (urban) level to the central government. The training of medical practitioners underwent reforms and more attention was given to general prevention and hygiene. On the initiative of physicians, attempts were made to improve living conditions in the cities and countryside. New roads were built and old ones were widened, underground sewers were constructed, care provision for the poor was reorganized and advice on hygienic was provided. Scientific research on health and hygiene was encouraged and given a place in government statistics.<sup>129</sup>

So far, I have examined medicalization from the perspective of the population as a whole. A crucial element in the medicalization process for people with disabilities in particular, according to historical materialists, is their increased institutionalization. The increasing frequency with which institutions were established in nineteenth-century Europe gives this assumption an empirical basis. People with mental impairments were the chief targets for institutional confinement, but institutions for people with sensory impairments emerged as well, and no doubt poorhouses included paupers suffering from a range of disabling conditions. Archival sources, dating from the middle of the nineteenth century, confirm that in Belgium deaf persons resided in a wide range of institutional establishments. Deaf people could be found in homes for the elderly, institutions for 'the insane', hospitals, poorhouses, orphanages, charitable institutions, monasteries and deaf schools.<sup>130</sup> Provincial censuses, compiled in Belgium in the nine-

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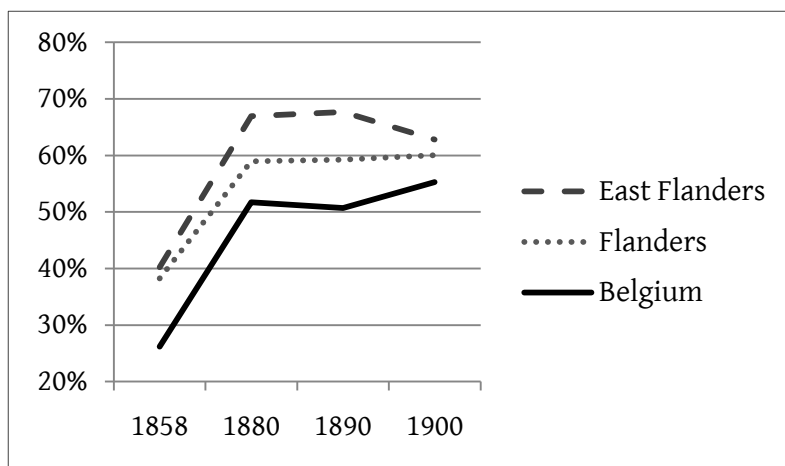
<sup>128</sup> Gijswijt-Hofstra, M. (1994) "Uitdagingen voor medisch-historisch onderzoek" In: Coppens, H. & De Kok, H. (eds.) *Van zotten, kwakzalvers, chirurgijns, vroedvrouwen... Medische zorg in de Kempen voor de medicalisering*. Brussels: Algemeen Rijksarchief, 7-16.

<sup>129</sup> Bruneel, C. (1998) "Ziekte en sociale geneeskunde", 18-25; Devos, I. (1998) "Ziekte: een harde realiteit", 126-7; Lenders, P. (1998) "De moderne overheid en de aanzet tot een gezondheidsbeleid" In: De Maeyer, J. (ed.) *Er is leven voor de dood. Tweehonderd jaar gezondheidszorg in Vlaanderen*. Kapellen: Pelckmans, 32-42.

<sup>130</sup> Beveren, National Archives. Folder 67/2: 1851-1870, Fund of Benevolence (1858-1859).

teenth century, provide information on the number of deaf individuals residing in a “special institution or public hospital” at the time of the censuses.<sup>131</sup>

**Figure 2.20** Deaf individuals residing in an institution or hospital, 1858-1900 (% of total deaf population)<sup>132</sup>



Source: *Exposé de la Situation du Royaume (1851-1860)(1861-1875)(1876-1900)*

Figure 2.20 is based on the numbers recorded in the provincial censuses of 1858, 1880, 1890 and 1900. It shows a strong rise in the percentage of institutionalized deaf persons in the second half of the nineteenth century. By the end of the nineteenth century, more than half the deaf population resided in some kind of institution. In East Flanders the rates fall slightly at the end of the century, but the percentage of institutionalized deaf people is still the highest in comparison to the region of Flanders and Belgium in general. Since deaf schools are also considered institutions and the duration of institutionalization is unknown, it is difficult to make bold statements about institutionalization and social deprivation based solely on census data.

Demographic sources provide an answer to the drawbacks of the censuses in measuring institutionalization. Civil records and population registers provide information on the residences of individuals respectively at the time of a life event (birth, marriage, death) and on a continuous basis, and can thus uncover patterns of institutionalization in space and time.<sup>133</sup> In Chapter 6 and 7, I analyse the networks of formal and informal care for the deaf in more detail.

<sup>131</sup> The results of these censuses are published in the *Exposé de la situation du Royaume*.

<sup>132</sup> According to the *Exposé*, the total number of deaf individuals is based on estimates and not on exact counts.

<sup>133</sup> In the civil records, the name of the street is recorded and it is specified whether the person resides in their own house, someone else’s house or an institution. Since these certificates are snapshots in time, it is never clear how long someone has resided in this place. In population registers, individuals residing in an institution are registered at the address of the institution.

## Conclusion

In Part 1 I set out the theoretical and empirical framework of this research. Throughout the first chapter, I illustrated how disability studies underwent a transition from a dominant medical model that considers disability as a personal tragedy to a social model in which disability is perceived as a social product instead of a biologically determined inevitability. In the last three decades in particular, history has entered the field of disability research, usually in a two-fold way. On the one hand, in the form of *microscopic histories* that provide a blunt overview of the history of disability in a few paragraphs. On the other hand, in the adoption of a historical materialist perspective. The latter provides the foundation for this study.

According to historical materialists such as Oliver and Finkelstein, disability in its present sense is an outcome of the nineteenth-century development of Western industrial society. More specifically, historical materialist scholars point to the negative influence of industrialization and medicalization: before the nineteenth century disabled people were recognised as an integral part of society, but in the wake of industrial and medical developments they became ‘outsiders’. Historical materialist theory can be criticised both from a disability studies perspective and from a historical perspective. Nonetheless, the contribution of historical-materialist theoreticians to the development of a historical approach to disability is generally acknowledged. Strangely however, the veracity of the assumption of a nineteenth-century deterioration in the living conditions of the disabled has never been empirically tested. This is not to say that the field of disability history is without noteworthy historical studies into the lives of the disabled in the past, as I have shown in sections 1.3 and 1.4. However, we are still very much in the dark about the daily lived experiences of people with an impairment in the past.

This research project aims to be a first attempt to shed light on the lives of a group of disabled people, more specifically the deaf. Although several studies have successfully examined the lives of deaf men and women in the past by the use of a wide range of sources and approaches, most of them only tell the story of a limited number of deaf persons or of a specific group within the deaf population.

In Chapter 2 I have shown how this project has the ambition to study a large group of deaf individuals coming from a wide range of socio-economic and geographical backgrounds and belonging to different generations. The delineation of a research group of 284 deaf and 284 hearing research individuals and the reconstruction of their life courses required the use of a varied set of sources, which I subjected to a thorough examination in section 2.1. The results of the archival searches was compiled in a MS Access database, in which the information from the sources was translated into a set of analysable variables ready for bivariate and multivariate analyses. These analyses form

the basis of the quantitative results presented in the thematic chapters of Part 2. Throughout these chapters, I expand the quantitative results for the research population with more general statistical information and with findings from qualitative sources such as contemporary literature and newspaper articles. In this way, I aim to disentangle the complexity of the life courses of the deaf from different perspectives. I have ended Part 1 with a discussion of the East Flemish research context. The description of the economic, demographic and medical developments in section 2.3 can serve as a general point of reference for interpreting the results of the thematic chapters in Part 2.

# 2

## Deaf Lives

*“Deaf and hearing people share a common past. How could it be otherwise? Most deaf people are born into hearing families. Their lives and histories are radically intertwined.”*  
(R.A.R. Edwards, 2012, 1)





# Childhood

*“A child who has no language must necessarily possess but few ideas.”*  
(Laurent Clerc, 1816)



## 3 Growing up deaf

### 3.1 The history of childhood and disability

The history of childhood has been an important subject of study and debate in the last five decades. In particular, ideas about the relationship between parents and their children have driven a wedge between more or less two clusters of scholars. One group of scholars believes that the selfless love parents give their children is a quite modern phenomenon. This view is most strongly associated with Philippe Ariès, who in 1960 was the first to argue that the concept of childhood was ‘discovered’ at the end of the thirteenth century and only became significant in the seventeenth century. Before that period, children were regarded as small adults, who had little emotional significance for their parents.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Edward Shorter located *The Making of the Modern Family* in nineteenth-century industrial society. According to Shorter, this entailed a transition of the family from a predominantly economic unit to a more emotional support system. Up until that time relationships between parents and their children would have been formal, distant and characterized by indifference. However, the emergence of romantic love, economic independence and the nuclear family in the nineteenth century led to the development of a more caring relationship between parents and their offspring.<sup>2</sup> Lloyd de Mause even stated that “*the further back in history one goes, the lower the level of child care, and the more likely children are to be killed, abandoned, beaten, terrorized, and sexu-*

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<sup>1</sup> Ariès, P. (1960) *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime*. Paris: Pion.

<sup>2</sup> Shorter, E. (1975) *The Making of the Modern Family*. New York: Basic Books. Similar ideas can be found in: Stone, L. (1977) *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England 1500-1800*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson. Stone, however, situates this development earlier in time, between 1450 and 1800.

ally abused.”<sup>3</sup> The general idea is that only within the last 300 years have parents become more emotionally attached to their children and suffered more from their children’s illnesses and deaths.<sup>4</sup> However, from the 1980s the pessimistic views on past childhood experiences were challenged by scholars who believed that parental affection for children has always existed. Linda Pollock, for example, argued that parental concern had been a steady factor of family life from the late Middle Ages to the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> More recently – through the examination of smaller, more homogenous groups of families – the consensus has grown that childhood experiences in the past were neither unilaterally negative nor positive.<sup>6</sup> According to Paula Fass, the love of parents for their children cannot be said to have begun at one point in history, just as the cold-hearted treatment did not simply end in modern times. Rather the ideals and experiences of childhood, as well as the forms in which parents express love and caretaking, have changed according to time and place. Difficulties, such as financial and emotional problems, could have prevented even loving parents from protecting their children. Similarly, childhood experiences are influenced by political, economic, cultural and social institutions, such as the organization of schooling, welfare institutions for orphans and views on child labour.<sup>7</sup> The question can be raised as to what extent the childhoods of children with disabilities differed from those of non-disabled children. Is the history of childhood and disability an unmitigated “*legacy of neglect*”<sup>8</sup>, as Safford and Safford described it, or were the experiences of disabled children equally dependent on the families and timeframe in which they grew up?

While historical research into ‘ordinary’ children and their parents has been strongly hindered by a lack of sources, this is even more true with regard to research into the

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<sup>3</sup> DeMause, L. (2005) “The Evolution of Childhood” In: Frost, N. (ed.) *Child Welfare: Historical Perspectives*. New York: Routledge, 21. DeMause originally published his theory in: DeMause, L. (ed.) (1974) *The History of Childhood*. New York: Psychohistory Press. In the late eighteenth century, parents would have started to pay more attention to children due to the increased availability of birth control. Parents with fewer children would have been better able to take care of them.

<sup>4</sup> Clarke, J. (2004) “Histories of Childhood” In: Wyse, D. (ed.) *Childhood Studies: An Introduction*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 5. This chapter provides a nice overview of the debates on the history of childhood.

<sup>5</sup> Pollock, L.A. (1983) *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500-1900*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 15 & 187.

<sup>6</sup> Heywood, C. (2001) *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times*. Cambridge: Polity Press. A comprehensive overview of childhood history can be found in: Foyster, E.A. et al. (2010) *A Cultural History of Childhood and Family*. Oxford: Berg, 6v.; Fass, P. S. (2013) *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World*. London/New York: Routledge.

<sup>7</sup> Fass, P. S. (2013) *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World*, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Safford, P.L. & Safford, E.J. (1996) *A History of Childhood and Disability*. New York/London: Teachers College Press, 1.

childhoods of disabled persons.<sup>9</sup> Faced with a scarcity of sources, many authors reflect in a more general way about historical attitudes to disabled children. However, their descriptions are too often simply copied from secondary works and based on a narrow empirical basis. Statements such as “*the Ancient Greeks, aiming to create the ‘perfect race’, always killed deaf children*” and “*the majority of deaf children were labelled ‘deaf and dumb’ until the present century*” from the historical chapter of Robinson and Stalker’s book *Growing Up with Disability* exemplify this approach.<sup>10</sup>

Still, some scholars have endeavoured to uncover real experiences of disabled children in past societies. The title of Philip L. Safford and Elizabeth J. Safford’s book, *A History of Childhood and Disability* (1996), raised high expectations.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, the almost exclusive focus of the authors on the teaching of children with disabilities makes this book more a history of special education than one of childhood and disability. While interesting in itself, the book does not provide a comprehensive picture of how disabled children acted and have been acted upon in historical societies. The institutional gaze seems to characterize many of the publications regarding disabled childhood experiences.<sup>12</sup> The aim of Borsay and Dales’ book *Disabled Children: Contested Caring, 1850-1979* to “*identify the shared experiences of disabled children*”<sup>13</sup> also mainly results in an examination of disabled children’s interaction with medical and educational services. Accordingly, a common theme throughout the book is the difficulty of gaining insight into the experiences of the recipients of care themselves, the disabled children, as the only available records are written from the perspectives of the institutions where the children were treated or educated.<sup>14</sup> Let alone that the records reveal information about the experiences of children living outside institutional walls. This brief overview suggests that many aspects of the historical childhood experiences of persons with disabilities are yet to be discovered.

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<sup>9</sup> Some egodocuments are published, though not for the region of Belgium. E.g. Ballin A. (2002) *The Deaf Mute Howls*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press (originally published in 1930). Albert Ballin, born in 1867, attended a residential school for the deaf until he was sixteen. He wrote down his experiences.

<sup>10</sup> Oswin, M. (1998) “An Historical Perspective” In: Kingsley, J. & Stalker, K. (eds.) *Growing Up with Disability*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 29-42.

<sup>11</sup> Safford, P.L. & Safford, E.J. (1996) *A History of Childhood and Disability*.

<sup>12</sup> E.g. van Drenth, A. & Meyers, K. (eds.) (2011) “Normalizing Childhood: Policies and Interventions Concerning Special Children in the United States and Europe (1900-1960)” Special issue in: *International Journal of the History of Education*, 47/6. In section 1.4, I illustrated that many of the studies into deaf history focus on the development of deaf education.

<sup>13</sup> Dale, P. & Borsay, A. (2012) *Disabled Children: Contested Caring, 1850-1979*. London: Pickering & Chatto, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Hellal, P. (2013) “Review: Disabled Children: Contested Caring, 1850-1979” *H-Disability*, <<http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=38319>>.

## 3.2 Uncovering deaf childhood experiences

Similar to sources written from an institutional perspective, demographic sources remain largely silent on the experiences of disabled children. Offering a comprehensive overview of the experiences of deaf children is thus hardly an option. Nonetheless, through a combination of quantitative and qualitative source materials I aim to uncover some features of the experience of growing up deaf in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century East Flanders. The analysis starts from three different perspectives.

In the first section (3.3), the parental households of the deaf children are the focal point.<sup>15</sup> The life course approach allows one to look at childhood experiences from a non-institutional perspective. Using the life course data, some questions become answerable: in what types of families did deaf children grow up? And to what extent were they employed in the household economy? This kind of analysis can provide more insight into the conditions in which deaf children who stayed at home grew up. Still, the question as to what extent the functioning of the household was affected by the presence of a deaf child remains hard to answer. According to Turner, a disabled child may have placed family life under severe pressure. On the one hand, a disabled child could drain a family's resources by preventing mothers in particular from undertaking employment outside the home. On the other hand, the extra care given by parents to a disabled child could strain relationships with other children in the household.<sup>16</sup> In reference to deaf children, these strains may have been less severe as they required less practical care regarding, for example, mobility, personal hygiene and feeding compared to children who were blind or who had physical impairments. However, from the perspective of deaf children, we can imagine their frustration as they could see the hearing members of their family communicating easily while they themselves could not participate. Part of this section is devoted to an analysis of the presence of multiple deaf persons within one family. Undoubtedly, the experiences of deaf children born in households with multiple deaf members were quite different from those who grew up deaf alone. This investigation dovetails perfectly with a discussion on the causes and the hereditariness of deafness.

In 3.4, I examine the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century attitudes to deafness based on contemporary qualitative sources. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries experienced an important ideological development regarding attitudes to deaf people. The idea that deaf people were also 'dumb' gradually gave way to less extreme views of their

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<sup>15</sup> As the control group of siblings grew up in the same households, this description also applies to them.

<sup>16</sup> Turner, D.M. (2012) *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England: Imagining Physical Impairment*. New York: Routledge, 131-4.

incompetence and the belief in their educability grew. The questions as to what it meant for parents to have a deaf child and how they envisioned the futures of their children are difficult to answer without personal testimonies. However, it is my view that the (initial) response from the parents of deaf children partly depended on public opinion about deafness. Some contemporary testimonies of deaf people suggest that the self-image of deaf persons was affected by public views as well. By exploring some of these contemporary perceptions, I aim to shed more light on the matter.

Finally, I look into the development of deaf education (3.5). From the early nineteenth century onwards, specialized boarding schools took up a large part of a deaf person's childhood. Many studies have concerned themselves with lengthy discussions on the general origin and development of deaf education (see 1.4). So I focus on examining the motives behind the establishment of deaf schools and describing the two East Flemish deaf schools attended by the research population.

### **3.3 Deaf children in their households**

Children left few traces in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century record trail. Birth certificates only contain information about a child's name, sex, date and place of birth. Population registers, introduced in 1846, generally only reported a child's name, date and place of birth. At the start, the population registers of many villages did not even mention this information for the younger children. They merely reported the number of male and female children younger than 12, living in each household. However, population registers also report the address at which a child lived and information on the persons with whom they shared the household. So population registers are invaluable in reconstructing the household composition and living situation of children.

In addition, information on the living situation of deaf children was supplemented in two ways. First, by the retrieval of civil certificates reporting the events experienced by siblings and parents. Based on the information from the birth and death certificates of the siblings, we can reconstruct the size and composition of the household, assess the birth rank of the deaf child, determine the occupations of the parents and the subsequent residences of the deaf child. Similarly, the marriage certificates of the parents reveal information about the level of literacy and the occupations of both parents, and thus about the socio-economic status of a household. Moreover, the parents' death certificates indicate at which age a deaf child lost one or both parents. Birth, marriage and death certificates are essential for the reconstruction of the parental household in the period before there were population registers. Second, information was retrieved from the sources in which the deaf individuals were selected. All the deaf women selected in



the matriculation list of the *Institut des Sourdes-Muettes* were underaged at the time of registration. Similarly, several research individuals were registered in the *Staat van alle de stomme-dooven* and individual bulletins during their childhood. These sources provide us with additional information about the state of indigence of some households, the presence of other disabled persons in the family and the duration of schooling.

I assembled the information collected from these sources in *parental household* files (2.2.1.1). The dataset consists of 252 parental household files, connected to the individual files of the 284 deaf persons. The parental household files constitute the starting point for the analysis of the composition (3.3.1) and socio-economic situation (3.3.2) of the households and the presence of deaf relatives in the deaf children's households (3.3.3). The age at which the deaf children left the parental households and the situation at the time of their leaving are discussed in Chapter 6 (6.2.3).

### 3.3.1 Household composition

Household composition can be assumed to affect children's lives in important ways. The size and structure of the household and its capacity to sustain itself played a critical role in how children were raised, their level of formal education, and whether or not they were required to participate in the labour force.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, the household composition of many deaf children is unknown due to the absence of population registers. All deaf persons in the first birth cohort and a considerable number in the second grew up in the period before population registers were kept.<sup>18</sup> Based on the birth and death certificates of the siblings and parents, we have an indication of a child's household size at different points in time. However, it is not possible to ascertain whether and when the household was extended by additional members, such as relatives or servants, or when the household decreased in size due to, for example, siblings moving out.

The composition of the parental household during childhood could be reconstructed for 97 deaf persons (34 percent). All 97 men and women were born in the second birth cohort (1830-1860). The analysis of their life course trajectories shows that 74 percent of these children grew up in a nuclear household, composed of one or both parents and siblings. In 21.6 percent of the households, the nuclear household was extended by other family members, in particular widowed grandparents and unmarried aunts and uncles. Whereas grandparents relied on their children for support in old age, unmarried

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<sup>17</sup> Fass, P.S. (2004) *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood: in History and Society*. New York/London: Macmillan Reference USA, 340.

<sup>18</sup> Deaf children born in the 1830s were often already in their late teens and early twenties when population registers started to be kept (1846).

siblings chose to live with a married sibling because co-residence provided a more secure alternative to a life on their own. From the perspective of the head of the households, the co-resident siblings could contribute to the household income.<sup>19</sup> From the perspective of the children, the presence of grandparents and unmarried aunts and uncles may have entailed extra support. 15.4 percent of the deaf children lived in a nuclear household together with unrelated servants. The fathers of these children most frequently worked as farmers, shopkeepers or innkeepers and could employ servants to assist them with their work. 7 percent of the households consisted of both extra family members and servants.<sup>20</sup> Although some children lived – at least part of their childhoods – in extended households, most deaf children spent their childhoods in nuclear families, consisting of only parents and siblings.

The number of siblings and the lifespan of the parents could be retrieved for a larger number of deaf persons. The birth certificates of the siblings give an indication of the household size and birth rank of the deaf children. The death certificates of siblings and parents show the extent to which deaf children were faced with the loss of close relatives. I was able to reconstruct the household size of 242 parental households, in which 274 deaf persons lived.<sup>21</sup> The 274 deaf children had 1577 siblings, which comes down to an average of six to seven children per household.<sup>22</sup> Only six deaf persons (2 percent) were an only child. In 40 cases, the deaf child was the last born child (15 percent). The question can be raised whether the parents in these 46 families were put off having more children after the birth of a deaf child and consciously decided to have no more children. In historical fertility research, this strategy to limit fertility is referred to as

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<sup>19</sup> A number of deaf singles also chose to live in the household of unmarried siblings during adulthood. See Chapter 6 (6.2.3.2).

<sup>20</sup> The sum of the percentages is more than a 100 percent (74+21.6+15.4+7=118 percent) because the household composition of some children changed during childhood. By consequence, some children are counted in more than one category. In Chapter 6, I will show that the periods in which households were extended by extra relatives or servants were generally short. So for most of their childhoods, the children lived with their parents and siblings.

<sup>21</sup> In 10 households (4 percent) the number of children is uncertain. As the parents in these 10 households moved from an unknown municipality to the place of birth of the deaf child, it is possible they conceived children in the former place of residence. Because these children remain undetected, these families are left out of the analysis.

<sup>22</sup> Only children born from the same parents as the deaf child are taken into account. Half-brothers, half-sisters, stepbrothers and stepsisters are not included. An average of six children is consistent with national averages. E.g. Alter, G. (1988) *Family and the Female Life Course. The Women of Verviers, Belgium, 1849-1880*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 166; Vandenbroeke, C. (2004) "Karakteristieken van het huwelijks- en voortplantingspatroon. Vlaanderen en Brabant, 17de-19de eeuw" In: Lambrecht, T. & Devos, I. (eds.) *Bevolking, voeding en levensstandaard in het verleden. Verzamelde studies van prof. dr. Chris Vandenbroeke*. Ghent: Academia Press, 249-90.

stopping.<sup>23</sup> The fear of having another deaf child or concerns about the extra care involved in looking after a deaf child may have encouraged parents to reconsider the decision to have more children. However, several indicators suggest this was not the case. First, the mothers of the 46 children were on average 37.7 years old (median 39.2 years old) when their deaf child was born. Thus, in many households the absence of a subsequent child was probably the result of the high age of the mother. A second obstacle to conceiving more children was the death of one or both parents. For example, Joseph Philippe Boerewaert was born in 1846 as the second child of Judocus Antonius and Coleta Verstrepen. Coleta was 19 when she gave birth to Joseph Philippe. Her untimely death in 1848 ended the opportunities for the household to grow. The death or absence of a father could equally thwart additions to the family. Cecile Van Hove was born in 1840 as the illegitimate daughter of the 24-year-old domestic servant Maria Judoca Van Hove. Maria Judoca never married and had no more children out of wedlock. Only in a few households is the explanation for the stopping behaviour unclear. For example, Anna Brednus was 22 when she gave birth to her first and only child, Francois Van Brantegem. Although she and her husband only died in their eighties, they conceived no more children. Similarly, Marie Therese De Pauw remained the only child of Henri and Amelie Vergauwen, despite the fact that her parents married in their twenties and only died in their seventies. As infertility and health problems may have been at play as well, the reason for their low number of children remains a matter for conjecture. Also, the cause and time of onset of a child's deafness may have played a role. If a child had become deaf early in life as a result of an illness, parents were probably less likely to decide to have no more children compared to when a child was born deaf. Moreover, in the absence of medical knowledge of genetics, it is doubtful that parents could assess their chance of having another deaf child and, as a result, adjust their reproductive behaviour accordingly. The large number of families (83 percent) in which siblings did follow the birth of a deaf child suggests that parents did not adjust their family size after the birth of a deaf child. In a period in which couples could resort to only a few effective contraceptive methods, such as coitus interruptus and periodic abstinence, it remains questionable as to whether parents were able to engage in family planning, even if they wished to.

A key ingredient of family size, but also of the functioning of a household, was the life-span of both parents and siblings. In a period characterized by a general lower life ex-

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<sup>23</sup> E.g. Van Bavel, J. (2004) "Detecting Stopping and Spacing Behavior in Historical Demography. A Critical Review of Methods" *Population*, 59/1, 117-28.

pectancy, many children could expect to lose one or both parents and siblings.<sup>24</sup> According to Stone, “less than half of the children who reached adulthood did so while both their parents were alive”.<sup>25</sup> In the dataset 31 percent of the deaf children (N=89) lost one or both parents before their sixteenth birthday. Eight children even became full orphans before that age. The latter either continued to live with a step-parent or adult siblings or they moved to a relative’s house. The only person to take a different path was Francisca Bogaert, who according to the *Staat van alle de stomme-dooven* was “provided for by the hospital” after the death of both parents.

In several households the death of a parent may have brought about remarriage, new step-siblings and the formation of a blended family.<sup>26</sup> The arrival of a step-parent and step-siblings may have re-awakened communication difficulties for the deaf child. Being unfamiliar with deafness, it probably took some time before the new family members understood the gestures of the deaf child. This may have put an even bigger strain on reconstituted families. Sometimes the widowed parent – especially mothers – stayed single. Depending on a household’s financial situation and the ages of the children, this may or may not have led to a period of economic hardship. The situation was probably most serious for widowed mothers with young children.<sup>27</sup> The presence of young children made a mother’s wage essential for survival, but simultaneously, she was needed at home to take care of the children. Therefore, the loss of a parent may have compelled children to start contributing to the household income at a younger age.<sup>28</sup> For example,

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<sup>24</sup> See: Oris, M. & Ochiai, E. (2002) “Family Crisis in the Context of Different Family Systems: Frameworks and Evidence on ‘When Dad Died’” In: Derosas, R. & Oris, M. (eds.) *When Dad Died. Individuals and Families Coping with Distress in Past Societies*. Bern: Lang, 17-80.

<sup>25</sup> Stone, L. (1977) *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*. London/Washington: George Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 66. See also: Dupâquier, J., Helin, E., Laslett, P., Livi-Bacci, I. & Sogner, S. (1981) *Marriage and Remarriage in Populations of the Past*. London/New York: Academic Press.

<sup>26</sup> As the life course reconstruction was not extended to remarriages of the widowed parents, it is difficult to make definitive statements about step-siblings and reconstituted families.

<sup>27</sup> Many studies throughout Europe have shown the close correlation between widowhood and poverty; e.g. Henderson, J. & Wall, R. (1994) “Introduction” In: Henderson, J. & Wall, R. (eds.) *Poor Women and Children in the European Past*. London: Routledge, 12-6; Van Poppel, F. (1995) “Widows, Widowers and Remarriage in Nineteenth-century Netherlands” *Population Studies*, 49, 421-41; Fauve-Chamoux, A. (ed.) (2004) *The Welfare of Widows in Northern Europe 1700-1900*. Bern: Peter Lang. Nonetheless, Muriel Neven showed that in east Belgium a widow’s pauperization was dependent on her age. Young widows experienced a substantial loss of income, but widows aged 40 or over suffered less and could even benefit from the deaths of their husbands. Neven, M. (1998) “Intensity and Consequences of Widowhood in Nineteenth Century East Belgium” *Revue Informatique et Statistique dans les Sciences Humaines*, 34, 125-90.

<sup>28</sup> Poverty is considered one of the main causative factors of child labour. E.g. Basu, K. & Van, P.H. (1998) “The Economics of Child Labor” *American Economic Review*, 88, 412-27. Jane Humphries showed for industrial England that children started to work at a younger age when they had more siblings, dead and absent fathers and lived

Charles Louis Verzele, born deaf in April 1851, was 14 years old when the population registers recorded he worked as a day labourer. At the moment of registration in 1867, his father and three siblings had died. With one sibling left, who had resided in a mental institution since early childhood, he and his mother were dependent on each other for survival.

For the majority of the deaf children, whether orphaned or not, it is unknown whether they were engaged in labour activities because population registers were absent or incomplete with regard to children's employment. Nonetheless, several scholars have emphasized the widespread employment of children in the past. According to Colin Heywood, children were employed in numerous contexts, including family farms, artisan workshops, employer's homes (in the case of domestic service) and, from the nineteenth century, in factories.<sup>29</sup> Ilana Krausman has argued that child labour was especially prevalent in domestic manufacture such as spinning, which relied heavily on the work of younger children. Farming jobs that required little skill, such as animal farming and ploughing, were also allocated to young children.<sup>30</sup> Jane Humphries observed a similar pattern in the 1851 census of England and Wales. The census indicated that most economically active 10- to 14-year-old males were working in agriculture, as a messenger/porter or in cotton manufacture. Based on the 1846 industrial census, Mieke De Neve estimated that about 27 percent of the Belgian children in 1846 was employed in the cottage industry.<sup>31</sup> The informal nature of many of these tasks probably accounts for the under-registration of child labour in the dataset. In the case of deaf children, other factors may also have been at work. Children with a hearing impairment were perhaps more exempted from their obligation to work – or were otherwise less able to find work. According to Hugh Cunningham, there were many youngsters who were unable to find work at particular times of the year or in particular locations. They were unemployed in the sense that they were not engaged in productive labour in the home or in paid work.<sup>32</sup> Deaf children may have experienced even more difficulties in finding employ-

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in poverty. Humphries, J. (2010) *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>29</sup> Heywood, C. (2013) "Children's Work in Countryside and City" In: Fass, P.S. (ed.) *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World*. Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 125-6.

<sup>30</sup> Krausman I.B.-A. (1997) "Human Bonding: Parents and Their Offspring in Early Modern England" *Discussion Papers in Economic and Social History*. Oxford: University of Oxford (working paper), 13.

<sup>31</sup> De Neve, M. (1991) *Kinderarbeid te Gent 1830-1914*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished master's dissertation), 124. De Neve also shows that of the 1292 underaged boys who left school in Gent in 1864-66, 41 percent worked in a factory.

<sup>32</sup> Cunningham, C. (1995) *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500*. New York: Longman.

ment. Another explanation, only valid for the second birth cohort of deaf children, may be that fewer deaf children were employed because more of them attended school.

The need for children to contribute to the household income certainly affected their school attendance. Social scientists Sylvie-Anne Goffinet and Dirk Van Damme argue that education was closely linked to the socio-economic status of a household. Many working class families were dependent on their children's income for survival, so letting them attend school was often not an option. In other words, "*education was strongly conditioned by the necessity to use child labour*".<sup>33</sup> According to George Alter, attitudes to child labour in Verviers (Belgium) at the end of the nineteenth century were mixed. By the use of qualitative sources, he showed that workers were concerned about the welfare of their children. However, the constant threat of being reduced to poverty forced many of them to put their children to work.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Jane Humphries showed that many English working class mothers regretted that their children could not attend school.<sup>35</sup> It was not until 1889 that the first laws on child labour were adopted in Belgium. From then on, industrial labour was forbidden for children younger than 12. Boys between 12 and 16 and girls between 12 and 21 were 'only' allowed a maximum of 12 hours' work a day, 6 days a week. The regulation of child labour led in 1914 to the introduction of compulsory education for children aged between 6 and 12.<sup>36</sup> This explains why school attendance in Belgium only significantly increased in the early twentieth century.<sup>37</sup> Goffinet and Van Damme calculated that in 1845 33 percent of Belgian children aged between 7 and 14 had never attended school. In 1875, the situation improved slightly as 25 percent of children were uneducated. However, it is likely that those who attended school did so on an irregular basis and that many of them did not finish primary school. In 1900, only 5 percent of the children had completed the full 6 years of education, while over 50 percent had spent less than four years in school.

55 percent of the hearing siblings in the dataset were literate (46 percent in the first birth cohort and 63 percent in the second). It therefore seems likely that many of them

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<sup>33</sup> Goffinet, S.-A. & Van Damme, D. (1990) *Functional Illiteracy in Belgium*. Brussels: King Baudouin Foundation, 11.

<sup>34</sup> Alter, G. (1988) *Family and the Female Life course. The Women of Verviers, Belgium, 1849-1880*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 172-3.

<sup>35</sup> Humphries, J. (2007) "'Because They are too Menny...' Children, Mothers and Fertility Decline. Evidence from Working-Class Autobiographies of the 18th and 19th Centuries" In: Janssens, A. (ed.) *Gendering the Fertility Decline in the Western World*. Bern: Lang, 113-50.

<sup>36</sup> Deneckere, G. (2006) *1900: België op het breukvlak van twee eeuwen*. Antwerp: Lannoo, 130.

<sup>37</sup> A new law on primary education in 1914 settled the question about compulsory education for children younger than 14. Due to the war, the law only became effective in 1921. In 1935, the school leaving age was raised to 16; in 1983 to 18.

did not attend or finish primary school.<sup>38</sup> In contrast, 95.5 percent of the deaf girls and 87.3 percent of the deaf boys, born between 1830 and 1860, attended a deaf school, for on average 7.9 years (2.1.1.4).<sup>39</sup> The higher school attendance of deaf children may be related to the perception that education was needed before deaf children could earn money for the family, in contrast to non-disabled children, who could work straight away. Sending one's deaf child to school may also have been a financial strategy as most of the parents did not have to pay the tuition fees themselves and the child was clothed and fed at school for most of the year (2.1.1.4).

### 3.3.2 Socio-economic status of the households

Previously, I argued that a household's capacity to sustain itself played a critical role in a child's level of formal education and their necessity to work. Here I look at the socio-economic situation of the parental households, based on the occupations recorded for the parents in their marriage certificate, the birth certificates of their children and the population registers.<sup>40</sup>

Table 3.1 shows the distribution of the occupations of the 252 fathers and mothers in the dataset over eight employment categories.<sup>41</sup> Fathers and mothers could 1) have a job in agriculture, 2) be unskilled labourers, 3) be employed in crafts, 4) be involved in trade and transport, 5) work in the service sector, 6) be domestic servants, 7) be registered explicitly as 'without occupation', or 8) have no registered occupation (unknown).<sup>42</sup> The percentages of parents with an unknown occupation are mentioned in the last row, but they are not taken into account in the calculations for those with a registered occupation. I distinguish between the parents of deaf children born in the first and second birth cohort. The 139 deaf children born in the first birth cohort originate from 123 par-

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<sup>38</sup> Goffinet S.-A. & Van Damme D. (1990) *Functional Illiteracy in Belgium*, 11-3. Among the siblings literacy rates increased from an average of 46.3 percent in the first birth cohort (38.1 percent of the sisters, 52.8 percent of the brothers) to an average of 63.2 percent in the second cohort (see Chapter 4, section 4.4). These percentages are more in line with the percentages of Goffinet and Van Damme.

<sup>39</sup> 57.6 percent of the deaf with a known level of literacy in the first birth cohort (N=33) were literate. However, in the absence of official deaf schools, it is unlikely that these individuals received a noteworthy education. Still, more deaf persons were literate compared to their hearing siblings in the same birth cohort.

<sup>40</sup> The recorded occupation for the father is the type of employment that was most commonly recorded in the birth certificates of his children. Since the occupation of the mother was not reported in the birth certificates, her occupation is based on the population register covering the childhood of most of her children or in the absence of population registers, on her marriage certificate.

<sup>41</sup> The most frequently recorded occupation was taken into consideration.

<sup>42</sup> The division into eight categories is based on: Jaspers L. & Stevens C. (1985) *Arbeid en tewerkstelling in Oost-Vlaanderen op het einde van het Ancien Regime*.

ents; the 145 deaf children born in the second from 129 parents. The employment pattern of the parents in the first birth cohort is compared with percentages for East Flanders based on the 1796 population census – collected by Jaspers and Stevens (see 2.3.2). 92 percent of the fathers and 90 percent of the mothers in the first birth cohort were at an economically active age (15-65) at the time of the 1796 census. This makes the census an ideal reference point. The percentages for East Flanders represent the occupations practised by the heads of the households. Both men and (single or widowed) women could be the head of a household. Unfortunately, Jaspers and Stevens do not mention the sex ratio of the household heads taken into account. Nonetheless, the census provides an indicative cross-section of the employment pattern of the general population during that period. The employment pattern of the second birth cohort of parents could not be compared with East Flemish averages due to the absence of comparable data. The industrial censuses of 1895 and 1896 (2.3.2) provide no adequate point of reference as only 3 percent of the fathers and 8 percent of the mothers were still economically active (younger than 65) at the time of these censuses.

**Table 3.1** Occupations of the parents according to birth cohort, in %

	Birth cohort 1				Birth cohort 2		
	F	M	P	E. F. <sup>43</sup>	F	M	P
Agriculture	43.8	38.7	41.3	39.4	25.6	17	21.3
Unskilled labour	23.6	9.7	16.6	18.5	13.2	15.1	14.2
Crafts	25.8	45.2	35.5	27	53.8	47.1	50.4
Trade and transport	2.2	3.2	2.7	4.1	4.1	12.3	8.2
Service sector	2.2	3.2	2.7	3	2.5	0	1.2
Domestic service	1.2	0	0.6	-	0.8	4.7	2.8
Without occupation	1.2	0	0.6	8	0	3.8	1.9
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>
Unknown	27.6	49.6	38.6	-	6.2	17.8	12

Source: MS Access database, parental household file

Notes: F: father, M: mother, P: parents, E.F.: East Flanders

Table 3.1 shows that the occupations of the parents in the first birth cohort were distributed over the occupational groups in a similar way to the general population. Most of the deaf children in the first birth cohort were born in a family in which the father and/or mother worked in agriculture, which was also the most common occupation in East Flanders during that period. The second most common occupation for parents was

<sup>43</sup> Jaspers L. & Stevens C. (1985) *Arbeid en tewerkstelling in Oost-Vlaanderen op het einde van het Ancien Regime: een socio-professionele en demografische analyse*. Ghent: Provinciebestuur Oost-Vlaanderen, 93. The percentages are averages based on figures for the countryside because 83 percent of the parents lived in a rural village.



in crafts, more specifically in textile manufacture. This indicates that most deaf children grew up in a household in which resources from agriculture were combined with a supplementary income from the cottage industry. In the course of the nineteenth century, it became more common for parents to work in crafts and trade and transport. This pattern is consistent with general economic developments (2.3.2). The correspondence of the employment pattern of the parents with the general economic configuration of East Flanders indicates that there was no relationship between the presence of a deaf child and the parents' occupations.

In a similar way, we can analyse the distribution of the deaf children over three socio-economic groups, based on the fathers' occupations. Table 3.2 presents the socio-economic status of the households, based on the father's most frequently recorded occupations. In order to classify individuals in a social hierarchy based on occupational information, I used the SOCPO classification scheme. SOCPO represents a hierarchy of social power and takes into account economic and cultural sources of social power, such as property, the skill involved in an occupation, whether a job entailed manual or non-manual tasks and its status. The result is a scheme with five SOCPO levels: 1) unskilled workers, 2) semi-skilled workers, 3) skilled workers, 4) middle class, and 5) elite.<sup>44</sup> I used standardized recoding algorithms to classify the occupations of the fathers into the SOCPO levels. For example, fathers working as day labourers and farm workers were classified as unskilled workers, those employed as spinners and weavers as semi-skilled workers, bakers and tailors as skilled workers, while tradesmen, farmers and shopkeepers belonged to the middle class. None of the fathers belonged to the elite. The households with a father working as an unskilled worker can be considered the poorest, while the middle class households probably had the best resources.

**Table 3.2** Socio-economic status (SES) based on the fathers' occupations, in %

Parental households (N=252)	
SES	%
Unskilled	14.3
Semi-skilled and skilled workers	35.5
Middle class	38.2
Unknown	12
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: MS Access database, parental household file

<sup>44</sup> Van De Putte, B. & Miles, A. (2005) "A Social Classification Scheme for Historical Occupational Data. Partner Selection and Industrialism in Belgium and England, 1800-1918" *Historical Methods*, 38/2, 61-92.

In about 14 percent of the households with a deaf child the father was an unskilled worker, compared to 38 percent of the households with a middle class father. The low number of unskilled fathers can be partially explained by the under-registration of unskilled labour. As contemporaries were aware of the low social status of unskilled labour, they tended to lie about their real occupation and report a higher valued occupation (see 4.2). Moreover, most fathers were economically active in a period in which day labouring as full-time employment was still uncommon (see 2.3.2). The lower representation of unskilled fathers should therefore be interpreted as a reflection of a general situation, and not as a sign that unskilled workers had fewer deaf children. The fact that 38 percent of the deaf children were born in a middle class family suggests that material factors, such as access to food and better living conditions, had little effect on the incidence of deafness.

The relationship between deafness and a person's socio-economic background was a recurring topic in nineteenth-century literature. Dr Sauveur, head of the division of medical affairs and public hygiene in Belgium, argued in a study in 1847 that "*la misère et l'habitation dans des localités insalubres sont au premier rang des causes occasionnelles de la surdi-mutité*" (poverty and living in unsanitary locations head the list of the occasional causes of deaf-mutism).<sup>45</sup> The impact of bad living conditions on the occurrence of deafness was considered to be mainly indirect: through a higher risk of illness, which in turn led to hearing loss. Similarly, Sir William Wilde claimed that the poor were supposed to be more susceptible due to their "*unhealthy dwellings, bad and insufficient food, impure air, want of clothing, and those other causes which elicit scrofulous manifestations*".<sup>46</sup> According to Sauveur, the good hygienic conditions and the general well-being in Belgium explained why Belgium had the smallest proportion of deaf-mute persons in comparison with other regions for which nineteenth-century statistics were available (Prussia, Sardinia, Tuscany, Switzerland, etc.). Belgium could benefit from its flatness and fertile soils and the fact that the poorer classes, "among whom deaf-mutism was most frequently found", were always able to sustain themselves and provide for their (medical) care through labour or charity. However, Sauveur specified that living in bad conditions only affected the incidence of deafness after birth and did not lead to a higher frequency of children with congenital deafness. He substantiates his finding by referring to the ratio of deaf children in the countryside and the cities. In general, deaf-mutism was more

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<sup>45</sup> Sauveur, D.J.J. (1847) *Statistique des sourds-muets et aveugles de la Belgique, du Duché de Limbourg et du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg, d'après un recensement en 1835*. Brussels: Hayez; Guérin, J. (1848) "Bibliographie. Statistique des sourds-muets et aveugles de la Belgique, d'après un recensement opéré en 1835; par M. le docteur Sauveur, etc." In: Guérin, J. (ed.) *Gazette Médicale de Paris*. Paris: Gazette Médicale, v.3, 701-2.

<sup>46</sup> Wilde, W.R. (1854) *On the Physical, Moral and Social Condition of the Deaf and Dumb*. London: John Churchill, 36 & 42.

common in the countryside. In 1835 the Belgian countryside had 4.7 deaf-mute persons for every 1000 inhabitants, compared to 3.9 persons in the cities. However, only taking into account persons with an acquired hearing loss, more deaf persons were found in the cities. The lack of hygiene and the higher incidence of scrofula in the cities explained, according to Sauveur, why a larger proportion of people in the cities became deaf during childhood. This brief discussion of the nineteenth-century views upon the relationship between deafness and a person's living situation, leads us to the next section on the potential causes of deafness.

### 3.3.3 Deaf relatives and the causes of deafness

The 284 deaf men and women were born in 252 different households. The smaller number of parental households than research individuals indicates that some parental households consisted of more than one deaf research person. Of the deaf persons selected for this study, 56 individuals were siblings, belonging to 24 households: 19 households consisted of two deaf persons, three households of three deaf children, one of four children and one of five children. Of the remaining 228 deaf research individuals (80 percent), it was unclear whether they had deaf relatives. However, based on the information in the sources in which I identified the deaf research individuals, I discovered that ten more deaf research individuals had a deaf family member. In all but two cases, the deaf family members were siblings.

Two of the sources in which the deaf research individuals were selected, the individual bulletins and the entry list of the *Institut des Sourdes-Muettes*, also recorded whether a deaf person had other deaf family members. An individual bulletin consisted of a list of 17 questions relating to different aspects of the deaf person's life. Question 16 concerned the presence of relatives who were also disabled in some way. The entry list consisted of several columns with information on the pupils, one of which contained notes. In the latter, the school secretary wrote down the presence of other disabled relatives in a pupil's family. So, for the 95 deaf children selected in these sources, we can be relatively certain about the presence of deaf relatives in their families. The individual bulletins and entry list indicated that an additional eight deaf persons had a deaf sibling – for some unknown reason, these siblings had not themselves been listed in the individual bulletins and entry list.

Besides these sources, population registers could also record an auditory disability for relatives living in the same household as the deaf research person. Unfortunately, the registers of many municipalities did not record impairments – as became clear when the deafness of many of the deaf research individuals themselves was not reported. So we can assume that possible impairments of other household members were also not registered. Moreover, if a deaf person had a deaf relative who lived in a separate house-

hold – and was not registered on the same page of the population register – this relative was unlikely to be found in the life course analysis. In two cases, the life course reconstruction uncovered the presence of non-cohabiting deaf kin: Marie Therese Haezaert, born deaf in Sint-Denijs-Westrem in 1809, and Charles Louis Callens, born deaf in Beveren in 1835, both had a deaf aunt. Marie Therese was selected in the entry list of the deaf school as the daughter of Jean Baptiste and Marie Colette Van Thienen. The *Staat van alle de stomme-dooven* mentioned the name of Therese Van Thienen, born in Sint-Denijs-Westrem in 1786. The listing of the same parents in the birth certificates of Marie Therese’s mother Marie Colette and of Therese Van Thienen confirmed that they were related. Therese Van Thienen was ultimately not included in the dataset as she did not meet the set criteria. Similarly, Charles Louis Callens was identified as a student at the *Institut des Sourds-Muets* in Ghent, while his aunt Joanna Catherina Callens was reported in the *Staat van alle de stomme-dooven*. The life course reconstruction showed that Charles Louis’ father and Joanna Catherina were siblings.

Thus, 66 deaf children (23 percent) had close relatives who were also deaf. However, this percentage should be considered a minimum. Deaf individuals selected in sources other than the bulletins and entry list may have had deaf relatives as well. For the period before 1846, when population registers were introduced, there is no way of assessing whether relatives, even those living in the same household as the deaf child, were deaf or otherwise disabled.

The high incidence of deafness in the families of the deaf research population enables one to speculate about the hereditariness of deafness. All but two deaf research persons with a deaf relative were born in a household in which one or more other children were also deaf. The family Deconinck from Wortegem beats everyone, with six of the nine children born deaf. This situation was probably quite exceptional as Alexander Rodenbach (1786-1869), Flemish politician and activist, mentioned the family in his 1855 publication.<sup>47</sup> Rodenbach used the family to support his claim that it was common for deaf-mute children to have other siblings who were also deaf-mute or otherwise weak-minded: besides six deaf-mute children, the family had three more children, who were one-eyed or lame or insane. The *Exposé de la situation du Royaume* of 1858 confirms that most families with multiple deaf persons consisted of households with two or more deaf children.

Table 3.3 presents the number of families in East Flanders and Belgium, in 1858, with multiple deaf persons, according to the relationships between the deaf persons. East Flanders and Belgium had respectively 25 and 212 deaf families. The most common

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<sup>47</sup> Rodenbach, A. (1855) *Les aveugles et les sourds-muets: histoire, instruction, éducation, biographie*. Tournai: J. Casterman, 202.

combination was a hearing couple who had two or more deaf children. Uncles and aunts, and cousins and nieces were respectively the second and third most common sets of relatives who were also deaf. Sir William Wilde made similar observations for Ireland in 1854, based on nineteenth-century census data.<sup>48</sup> As more children in one family were deaf, genetics appear to be at the source of the deafness. However, the low number of families in which parent(s) and child(ren) were both deaf, suggests that deafness was not simply passed on from parents to children. In the dataset as well, none of the deaf research persons had a parent who was reported deaf.<sup>49</sup> However, similar nineteenth-century observations did not hinder Alexander Graham Bell and others from developing eugenic theories about the “*degeneration of the human race*” as a result of intermarriages of the deaf (see 5.2).

**Table 3.3** Members in one family who are deaf (1858), in N

Family relationships	East Flanders	Belgium
Parent(s) and child(ren)	1	3
Parents, child en grandchild	0	1
Grandparent and grandchildren	1	2
Two or more children	20	182
Siblings and cousin(s)/niece(s)	0	3
Siblings and aunt(s)/uncle(s)	0	10
Cousin(s)/niece(s)	2	9
Husband and wife	1	2
<i>Total</i>	25	212

Source: *Exposé de la situation du Royaume (1851-1860)*

For 218 deaf children in the dataset (77 percent), the sources report no auditory impairment for their parents and siblings. In these cases, it is more difficult to conclude that deafness ‘runs in the family’. Nonetheless, the exclusive selection of individuals who are both deaf and mute indicates that the deafness was inborn or set in shortly after birth. Several causes may have resulted in congenital and infant deafness.

Historian M. Lynn Rose identified three major sources for a hearing impairment in the past: environmental causes, heredity and old age. The latter factor is negligible in this research. Environmental factors that may induce deafness are loud noises, acci-

<sup>48</sup> Wilde, W.R. (1854) *On the Physical, Moral and Social Condition of the Deaf and Dumb*, 41.

<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Nora Groce reported that 85 percent of the deaf children on Martha’s Vineyard had hearing parents. Groce, N. (1985) *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language: Hereditary Deafness on Martha’s Vineyard*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 22. And even today, an estimated 95 percent of deaf children are born to hearing parents. Mitchell, R.E. & Karchmer, M.A. (2004) “Chasing the Mythical Ten Percent: Parental Hearing Status of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students in the United States” *Sign Language Studies*, 4/2, 138-63.

dents such as a blow to the ear or illnesses such as chickenpox, cold viruses, influenza, measles or the mumps.<sup>50</sup> As these were common childhood infections it is possible that the deafness of some of the research individuals resulted from an illness shortly after birth. Another possibility is that the hearing loss was genetic. Present-day estimates suggest that about half of childhood deafness is due to hereditary causes. These hereditary causes imply that deafness was passed on in families who have a genetic background that favours deafness.<sup>51</sup> Regardless of heredity, congenital deafness could also be the result of a chromosomal aberration.<sup>52</sup> In this case, the hearing impairment was a non-inherited birth defect. Although people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were largely unaware of the rules of heredity, people probably did realize that some families were more likely than others to have deaf children.<sup>53</sup>

The *Exposé de la situation du Royaume* of 1858 provides a national overview of the causes of deafness for the Belgian deaf population (table 3.4). According to the census, about 64 percent of the deaf men and 62 percent of the deaf women were congenitally deaf. The remaining 36 and 38 percent became deaf after birth, generally as a result of an illness.

It is unclear how the organizers of the 1858 census distinguished between people with congenital and acquired deafness. Historian John V. Van Cleve argues that in the past it was impossible to determine when a child had become deaf because hearing could not be tested in newborns. Early researchers on deafness believed that congenital deafness could only have a hereditary cause, and that only accidents and illnesses could lead to deafness after birth. However, audiologist Marion P. Downs, medical geneticist George R. Fraser and otolaryngologist Burton F. Jaffe made a different case in the *Gallaudet Encyclopedia of deaf people and deafness*.<sup>54</sup> They argue that children can be born deaf due to a prenatal or perinatal (during birth) accident or illness. Similarly, a person can

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<sup>50</sup> Rose, M.L. (2006) "Deaf and Dumb in Ancient Greece" In: Davis, L.J. (ed.) *The Disability Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 17.

<sup>51</sup> Rehm, H.L. et al. *Understanding the Genetics of Deafness. A Guide for Patients and Families*. Cambridge: Harvard Medical School Center for Hereditary Deafness, <<http://hearing.harvard.edu/info/GeneticDeafnessBookletV2.pdf>>, consulted on 11/08/2014. The booklet gives a clear overview of the ways in which deafness can be passed on from parents to children.

<sup>52</sup> For more information on the heredity of deafness: Li, H.-S. (1992) "Genetic Influences on Susceptibility of the Auditory System to Aging and Environmental Factors" *Scandinavian Audiology*, 21/36, 1-39; Cohen, M.M. & Gorlin, R.J. (1995) "Epidemiology, Etiology, and Genetic Patterns" In: Gorlin, R. et al. (eds.) *Hereditary Hearing Loss and Its Syndromes*. New York: Oxford University Press, 9-21.

<sup>53</sup> Covey, H.C. (1998) *Social Perceptions of People with Disabilities in History*. Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 204.

<sup>54</sup> Downs, M.P. (1987) "Hearing Loss: Prenatal Causes" In: Van Cleve, J.V. (ed.) *Gallaudet Encyclopedia of Deaf People and Deafness*. New York: McGraw-Hill Company Inc., v.2, 23-4; Fraser, R. (1987) "Hearing Loss: Genetic Causes" In: Van Cleve, J.V. (ed.) *Gallaudet Encyclopedia of Deaf People and Deafness*. New York: McGraw-Hill Company Inc., v.2, 20; Jaffe, B.F. (1987) "Perinatal and Postnatal Causes" In: Van Cleve, J.V. (ed.) *Gallaudet Encyclopedia of Deaf People and Deafness*. New York: McGraw-Hill Company Inc., v.2, 24-6.

become deaf at any point in their lives because of hereditary causes. However, this medical knowledge was unavailable in the nineteenth century. So, in regard to the distinction made in the 1858 census, we can assume that the census officials assumed that congenitally deaf people were deaf from birth, whereas the others became deaf later in life due to disease or accidents.

**Table 3.4** Causes of deafness in Belgium (1858), in N and %

Causes	Men		Women	
	N	%	N	%
Congenital	724	63.8	530	62
Illnesses to the head	31	2.7	25	2.9
Rash	9	0.8	12	1.5
Respiratory organs	3	0.3	2	0.2
Fever	27	2.4	14	1.6
Mental disorders	8	0.7	2	0.2
Accidents and violence	16	1.4	22	2.6
Illnesses or undetermined causes	316	27.9	248	29
<i>Total</i>	<i>1134</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>855</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: Exposé de la situation du Royaume (1851-1860)

The limited medical knowledge about deafness at the time is also illustrated by the list of causes of deafness in the census. 21 men and women became deaf due to a “rash”. For five people the origin was located in their respiratory organs. It is doubtful that either a rash or problems with one’s respiratory organs could lead to deafness. It seems more likely that the rash and the respiratory problems themselves were also symptoms of an illness which in turn led to deafness. The rash may have been a symptom of scarlet fever. Similarly, “mental disorders” and deafness may both have been the outcome of, for example, meningitis. Popular beliefs regarding the origin of deafness display a comparable lack of medical awareness. The Flemish newspaper *De Volksgazet*, in an article about the causes of deafness, mentioned not only the impact of genetics, illnesses and accidents, but also the “bad lifestyle and dipsomania of parents” and “unfavourable economic or hygienic conditions”.<sup>55</sup> Education professor Margaret Winzer has described how both medical professionals and the public in mid-nineteenth century United States held that the emotions of the mother affected her unborn child and could mark it physically, mentally and morally. The harmful effects of the mother’s mental impressions on

<sup>55</sup> Article in *De Volksgazet*, February 27, 1924.

the foetus were thought to be especially pronounced in the case of deafness.<sup>56</sup> Sir William Wilde also described how the most popular view regarding the cause of deaf-mutism were frights experienced by the pregnant mothers.<sup>57</sup> Another common belief was that consanguinity (the marriage of close relatives) produced more deaf-mute children. In November 1862, the Francophone newspaper *Le Bien Public* published an article about marriages between relatives based on a study by the French doctor M. Boudin. Starting from the assumption that the risk in non-consanguineous marriages was 1, Boudin stated that the risk of having a deaf-mute child increased to 16 in marriages between first cousins, to 37 in marriages between uncles and nieces, and to 70 in marriages between nephews and aunts.<sup>58</sup> Following in the footsteps of Boudin, several Belgian scholars dedicated a study to consanguineous marriages.<sup>59</sup> The lack of more detailed information about persons engaged in consanguineous marriages (such as their medical backgrounds) and the difficulties in establishing that partners were actually related, made the matter difficult to resolve.

About 23 percent of the deaf children grew up in a family with more than one deaf person, usually a sibling. The remaining 77 percent of deaf children had – to my knowledge – no deaf relatives. We can assume that the childhood experiences of both groups were markedly different. Historian R. A. R. Edwards has described how deaf children developed their own idiosyncratic gestural systems in order to communicate at least on a rudimentary level with their families.<sup>60</sup> In families with multiple deaf children, it can be assumed that these home sign systems were more developed, especially among the deaf children. Parallel with the spread of deaf schools, the possibilities for deaf siblings to communicate expanded as they all learned to use sign language. Moreover, spending the greater part of the year away from home in a deaf boarding school may have been less upsetting if one still had siblings in close proximity. Several scholars have caught a glimpse of the experiences of children born in deaf families in the past. Historian Hannah Joyner tells the story of Towny Lawrence, who grew up deaf in mid-nineteenth century Louisiana (United States) amidst deaf siblings. Some of the letters Towny wrote to

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<sup>56</sup> Winzer M.A. (1993) *The History of Special Education: From Isolation to Integration*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 162.

<sup>57</sup> Wilde W.R. (1854) *On the Physical, Moral and Social Condition of the Deaf and Dumb*, 37; Similarly, a cleft lip, a club foot, idiocy, naevi, decrepitude and other kinds of congenital malformation or arrested development were thought to be related to “some shock or mental emotion, seeing a disgusting object, meeting a mute person, or being strongly impressed with some superstitious dread” (Wilde, 38.)

<sup>58</sup> “Mariages entre consanguins” in *Le Bien Public*, November 11, 1862.

<sup>59</sup> E.g. Legrain, J.-B. (1866) *Recherches critiques et expérimentales relatives aux mariages consanguins*. Brussels: Henri Manceaux.

<sup>60</sup> Edwards, R.A.R. (2012) *Words Made Flesh: Nineteenth-Century Deaf Education and the Growth of Deaf Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 60.



his siblings are preserved and indicate how his access to communication with deaf siblings made him grow up self-confident and aware of the existence of a deaf community.<sup>61</sup> Edwards too described how children from deaf families had a very different experience of growing up and communicating with deaf family members, compared to deaf children from hearing families. He quotes John T. Southwick, the valedictorian for the New York School in 1847, to describe the lonely experience of growing up deaf among hearing people:

*“Having done nothing to displease their parents, nor committed any crime, yet they are in some cases, miserably shut out from the presence of other people, so as to deprive them of their knowledge, and in their mental darkness they seem idiotic. This, some parents do in a most cruel manner, and appear like the savages, thrusting their pitiless daggers through the bosoms of little innocent children crying out for mercy.”*<sup>62</sup>

The quote clearly expresses Southwick’s belief that many parents found the idea of having a deaf child abhorrent. Moreover, Southwick blamed the parents for allowing the isolation of deaf children to persist by depriving them of knowledge. According to Edwards, this assessment was shared by several other deaf people in the nineteenth century. Pieter Verstraete and Walter Hellinckx too have illustrated how deaf children were denied education well into the nineteenth century because their parents believed that deafness and education were mutually exclusive.<sup>63</sup> This brings us to the questions of what it meant for parents to have a deaf child and to what extent deaf children felt socially accepted. Without personal testimonies, these questions are difficult to answer. However, an evaluation of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century attitudes to deafness may provide a possible alternative. Next, I explore some of these contemporary views on deafness and deaf people.

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<sup>61</sup> Joyner, H. (2001) “Signs of Resistance: Deaf Perspectives on Linguistic Conflict in a Nineteenth-Century Southern Family” In: Wilson, J.C. & Lewiecki-Wilson, C. (eds.) *Embodied Rethorics. Disability in Language and Culture*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 165.

<sup>62</sup> New York Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb (1845) *Twenty-Sixth Annual Report and Documents of The New York Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb to the Legislature of the State of New York for the Year 1844*. New York: Egbert Hovey & King Printers, 58.

<sup>63</sup> Verstraete, P. & Hellinckx, W. (2009) *Met een handicap naar school. Het ontstaan en de ontwikkeling van het onderwijs aan kinderen en jongeren met een handicap (1750-1950)*. Ieper: Vredestad Ieper, 12.

### 3.4 Contemporary attitudes to deafness<sup>64</sup>

The following quote by Roch-Ambroise Cucurron Sicard (1742-1822), a French abbé and instructor of the deaf, provides insight into a wide range of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century perspectives on deaf-muteness. In 1798, Sicard wrote:

*“Orphelin éternel sur la terre, ou tout le rapproche de la brute, et ou rien ne l’élève à la dignité de l’homme, accoutumé à ne rien deviner des causes qui produisent les effets don’t il est sans cesse le témoin, le monde physique est le seul sur lequel il porte ses regards, sans y rien voir que ce qui frappe les yeux des animaux. Il n’existe pas même pour lui de monde moral: il est absolument sans vertu; est-il également sans vice?... Placé au milieu de la société, et jamais avec elle, la vie n’est pour lui qu’une carrière laborieuse, sur laquelle aucune espèce de Bonheur ne verse ses douces influences pour en adoucir les peines. Soupçonneux à l’excès, il ne se rassure jamais sur les témoignages extérieures d’affection qu’on lui donne: il interroge tous les regards, non pour y découvrir l’expression d’une bienveillance don’t il ne peut avoir l’idée, mais plutôt des signes d’un mépris qu’il soupçonne et qu’il redoute. Toujours triste, toujours timide, et effrayé de tout, il voit les hommes doués des faculties que la nature lui a refusés, comme une espèce supérieure dans laquelle l’infortuné ne croit pas mériter d’être compté. Tel est le sourd-muet sans instruction.”<sup>65</sup>*

A commonly expressed statement with respect to congenitally deaf people was that they were in an “animal state”, not even possessing “the dignity of man”. In his 1803 publication, Sicard further expanded on the inhuman nature of deaf people by also

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<sup>64</sup> This sections focuses on the perception of deafness in particular. Undoubtedly, however, opinions on disability in general also had an influence. Herbert C. Covey in his popularizing book on the *Social Perceptions of People with Disabilities*, describes different images and stereotypes of people with disabilities: they were perceived as subhuman, as having special gifts or compensations, as evil, as being worthy of pity and charity, as scapegoats, as being entertaining (freaks), as being poor and beggars. Covey, H.C. (1998) *Social Perceptions of People with Disabilities in History*, 6-25.

<sup>65</sup> Sicard, R.-A. (1798) “Premier mémoire: Sur la nécessité d’instruire les sourds-muets de naissance, et sur les premiers moyens de communication avec ces infortunés” In: *Mémoires de l’Institut National des Sciences et Arts*. Paris: Baudouin, v.1, 41. Translation: Forever an orphan on earth, approached by all as an animal, and elevated to the dignity of man by nothing, accustomed to knowing nothing of the causes that produce the effects of which he is a constant witness, the physical world is the only thing he beholds, without seeing anything, since what ideas are gained through the eyes of animal. He does not even exist for the moral world: he is absolutely without virtue; is he even without sin?... Placed in the middle of society, but never really a member, life for him is but a difficult task, without any hope of Bliss to ease his pain. Suspicious to excess, he is never reassured by external tokens of affection given to him: he questions all looks, not to discover an expression of kindness of which he has no conception, but rather signs of contempt which he suspects and fears. Always sad, always shy, and afraid of everything, he sees people endowed with skills which nature has refused him, like a superior species among which the unfortunate does not believe he deserves to be. This is the fate of the deaf-mute without education.

comparing them to statues and machines. He stated: “In nearly everyone’s eyes these unfortunates are mere organized machines, good only for rendering minor assistance, like the domestic animals trained to serve man.”<sup>66</sup> Insensitive to any sensation by means of their ears, they were “doomed to stay the same all the time” and could not develop human knowledge.<sup>67</sup> The comparison of deaf people with animals relates to the question of what separates humans from animals. This debate, which goes back to Antiquity, has generated many hypotheses. Humans have been depicted as rational, having a history, a consciousness and a culture, in contrast to animals, which have an instinctual, ahistorical, non-conscious and non-cultural nature.<sup>68</sup> One of the most influential hypotheses, however, was the seventeenth-century argument by René Descartes that humans, as opposed to animals, have an immortal soul.<sup>69</sup> Contained within the concept of the soul were other subsidiary signs of humanity, such as the ability to speak, act morally and reasonably.<sup>70</sup> This belief continued into the nineteenth century. In 1836, in an interview between the Irish surgeon Charles Orpen and a deaf girl named Jane Hill, Jane answered the question of what made men differ from animals with the following: “*Man is a rational creature, composed of two parts, soul and body. The beasts have no souls.*”<sup>71</sup> Further on in the interview, we gather that the absence of a soul was believed to have two important consequences: the absence of a soul was equated with the absence of reason and the inability to “*go into a state of everlasting happiness*” in heaven after death.<sup>72</sup> Depicting deaf persons as animals, therefore, implied that they had no access to reason or to heaven.

The idea of the unreasonableness and immorality of deaf individuals also resonates in Sicard’s quote, which states that deaf people “know nothing” of the world around them and were “absolutely without virtue”. Since Antiquity, the dominant attitude to deaf people has been based on the following argument: thinking cannot develop without language. Language, in turn, cannot develop without speech. Speech cannot develop

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<sup>66</sup> Sicard, R.A. (1803) *Cours d’instruction d’un sourd-muet de naissance, et qui peut être utile à l’éducation de ceux qui entendent et qui parlent*. Paris: Le Clere, vi.

<sup>67</sup> Verstraete, P. (2009) “Savage Solitude: The Problematisation of Disability at the Turn of the Eighteenth Century” *Paedagogica Historica*, 45/3, 281.

<sup>68</sup> Van Cleve, J.V. (1993) *Deaf History Unveiled: Interpretations from the New Scholarship*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 102.

<sup>69</sup> Brantz, D. (2010) *Beastly Natures: Animals, Humans, and the Study of History*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1.

<sup>70</sup> Baynton, D.C. (1996) *Forbidden Signs. American Culture and the Campaign against Sign Language*. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 48.

<sup>71</sup> The letters and interviews collected by Orpen were designed to prove the necessity of deaf education and to show the progress made by deaf children during their education at the Claremont deaf school.

<sup>72</sup> Orpen, C.E.H. (1836) *Anecdotes and Annals of the Deaf and Dumb*. London: Robert H. C. Tims, 465-6.

without hearing. Therefore, those who cannot hear cannot think.<sup>73</sup> Those who were deaf were assumed to be incapable of human understanding, hence the frequently used term ‘deaf and dumb’. Deaf people were assumed to be “*locked in hopeless ignorance*” as they could not learn from the oral conversations of their surroundings. Thus, “*although they were surrounded by every species of intellectual food, their inability to hear meant they were debarred the very crumbs of knowledge.*”<sup>74</sup> As a result, throughout large parts of history deaf men and women have not been allowed to own real estate, act as a witness or be validly married – but equally they could not be punished if they committed a crime (see 7.2.5).<sup>75</sup> One of the first scientists to reconsider the association between hearing and thinking through empirical research was the Paduan physician Girolamo Cardano (1501-1576). In his *Quo continentur opuscula miscellanea ex Fragmentis et paralipomenon* (1663), he told the story of a congenital deaf man who had learned to read and write. Cardano concluded the man was able to ‘hear’ by reading and to ‘speak’ by writing, and thus to express his thoughts.<sup>76</sup> As stories of deaf people who were taught to communicate by means of reading, writing and signing spread throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, so did the belief that human knowledge could overcome deaf-muteness. The fact that the deaf could somehow learn to speak – although in an unconventional way – was considered proof that they were also capable of reason.<sup>77</sup> It is unclear when the legal situation for deaf people changed accordingly, but the publication of Sir William Wilde (1854) indicates that at least by that time a consensus existed that deaf-mute persons could contract marriages, inherit property, act as witnesses and make a will.<sup>78</sup> The changed perception of the association between language and reason is illustrated by Harvey Peet, president of the New York Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb. In 1855 he wrote that although “*the power of speech seemed the only difference between reasoning*

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<sup>73</sup> Higgins, P.C. (1980) *Outsiders in a Hearing World*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 23-4. Even within contemporary society the link between language and humanity is present. In 1989, the physician and neurology professor Oliver Sacks wrote: “*to be defective in language, for a human being, is one of the most desperate of calamities, for it is only through language that we enter fully into our humane state and culture*”. Sacks, O. (1989) *Seeing Voices: a Journey Into the World of the Deaf*. New York: Vintage books, 8.

<sup>74</sup> Joyner, H. (2004) *From Pity to Pride. Growing Up Deaf in the Old South*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 11; Joyner uses quotes from letters, school records, texts and other sources written in the mid-nineteenth-century South of the United States.

<sup>75</sup> Higgins, P.C. (1980) *Outsiders in a Hearing World*, 25-6.

<sup>76</sup> Rietveld-Van Wingerden, M. & Tijsseling, C. (2010) *Ontplooiing door communicatie: Geschiedenis van het onderwijs aan doven en slechthorenden in Nederland*. Antwerp: Garant, 25-7.

<sup>77</sup> Branson, J. & Miller, D. (2002) *Damned for Their Difference: The Cultural Construction of Deaf People as Disabled: A Sociological History*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 87.

<sup>78</sup> Wilde, W.R. (1854) *On the Physical, Moral and Social Condition of the Deaf and Dumb*, 62. No similar information was found for a Belgian context, but the observation is formulated by Wilde in such a manner that these regulations seem to have applied to an international context.

beings and animals devoid of reason [...] the man whose language is a language of gestures... is still, not less than his brother who possesses speech, undeniably a man".<sup>79</sup> Nonetheless, the underlying idea was that only through the instruction of a comprehensive language of gestures could deaf people become truly reasonable. Because, to paraphrase Peet, the signs a deaf-mute child invents to enable simple communication are too meagre to allow access to ideas that are beyond the sphere of direct intuition, such as religion.<sup>80</sup>

Similar considerations made Sicard conclude that deaf people did "not even exist for the moral world". According to Peet, none of the uneducated deaf had "any innate or self-originating ideas of a Supreme Being to whom love and obedience were due; of a Creator, or a Superintending Providence, of spiritual existences, or of a future state of rewards and punishments."<sup>81</sup> The belief that deaf people found themselves in a state of "spiritual darkness" was a key element in the negative view of deafness and central to the development of deaf education. Because they could not hear the word of God, deaf people were assumed to be ignorant of God, the soul, and immortality. They had no idea of the object of public or private worship and were therefore outsiders to the human practice of religion.<sup>82</sup> The exclusion from religion made many hearing people look on deaf people as heathens, savages and, consequently, morally irresponsible. Sir William Wilde described the morals of the deaf as followed in 1854: "A deaf mute will imitate whatever he sees, whether good or bad, just like a monkey." The view that deaf people were unable to distinguish right from wrong was expressed by others as well. M. César wrote in 1821: "ils ne connaissent ni lois ni devoirs, ni justice ni injustice, ni bien ni mal; la vertu et le vice sont pour eux comme s'ils n'étaient pas" (they know neither rights nor duties, neither justice nor injustice, neither right nor wrong; virtue and vice are as non-existent to them).<sup>83</sup> Therefore, it was one of the greatest pleasures of teachers of deaf-mutes, according to R.W. Scott (1870), to witness the "great moral advancement" and to know that "he has been the means [...] of sending into the world children who otherwise might have remained in a sad and pitiable state of moral degradation, persons capable of asserting their humanity, and of becoming honest and God-fearing men."<sup>84</sup>

Besides deaf people being without knowledge and virtue, Sicard's quote points to their solitude. The view that they were "placed in the middle of society, but never really a member" resonates in many nineteenth-century texts. "Oh weep for the deaf-mute!" Orpen stated, "all around him is one unvaried solitude of silence, deathlike, as the stillness of the

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<sup>79</sup> Peet, H.P. (1855) "Notions of the Deaf Before Instruction: Especially in Regard to Religious Subjects" In: Barnard, F.A.P. *Education of Deaf and Dumb*. Boston: North American Review, 9.

<sup>80</sup> Peet, H.P. (1855) "Notions of the Deaf Before Instruction", 26.

<sup>81</sup> Peet, H.P. (1855) "Notions of the Deaf Before Instruction", 35.

<sup>82</sup> Joyner, H. (2004) *From Pity to Pride*, 12.

<sup>83</sup> (1821) *Raphel's Kunst, Taube und Stumme Reden zu Lehren, mit Einer Vorrede des H. Cesars, etc.* Leipzig: N. Folg, 20.

<sup>84</sup> Scott, R.W. (1870) *The Deaf and Dumb: Their Education and Social Position*. London: Bell and Daldy, 73-4.

grave.”<sup>85</sup> As deaf people were “forced to ever wander on in a voiceless, silent solitude”<sup>86</sup>, they were assumed to be in a miserable state of unhappiness. “Alone in the world, his faculties undeveloped, and shut out by his unhappy circumstances from thoroughly communicating his ideas to the rest of mankind, the deaf mute, in an especial manner, claims the sympathies of all”.<sup>87</sup> Many contemporary newspaper articles reporting on a topic regarding a deaf person did indeed apply the notion of “ongelukkige” or “malheureux” (unfortunate) to the deaf person.<sup>88</sup> The central reason for their supposed unhappiness, according to the hearing, was related to the fact that they were cut off from the sounds of nature and from their families. Besides missing all the pleasures of “the varied music of Nature”, deaf people were assumed to “kn[o]w nothing of the relations of father and mother, sister and brother; of family affections and ties of kindred, that highest link in the chain of human connections.” As a result, according to Joyner, many hearing people assumed that the inability of deaf children to hear their parents implied that they were unaware that their families loved them: “No word of human kindness nor voice of human love, ever found its peaceful way to their hearts.”<sup>89</sup> This lack of kindness, according to Sicard and others, resulted in the suspicious nature of many deaf people.<sup>90</sup>

A recurring topic in relation to the assessment of the ‘miserable’ state of the deaf was the question of who was to be most pitied: the deaf or the blind. In general, it was believed that the blind were the most unfortunate when they were alone, while the deaf-mutes were most unfortunate in society. Rodenbach agrees that “tandis qu’au milieu d’un cercle, le sourd-muet est triste et souffrant, l’aveugle et rayonnant de joie et il oublie son malheur dans le charme de la conversation” (while the deaf-mute is sad and suffers in the middle of a group, the blind person radiates joy and forgets his misfortune in the charm of the conversation). To be blind was considered “not half so pitiable as being deaf, because the pleasures of conversation and the charms of music can much alleviate their want of sight, yet without one ray of intellectual comfort from social intercourse or religious principles, deafness was a condition mournful in the extreme.”<sup>91</sup> Besides the social difficulties, great emphasis was placed on the possibilities of obtaining knowledge. Rodenbach considered blind people to be more intelligent as it was easier to acquire knowledge through hearing

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<sup>85</sup> Orpen, C.E.H. (1836) *Anecdotes and Annals of the Deaf and Dumb*, 40.

<sup>86</sup> Joyner, H. (2004) *From Pity to Pride*, 10.

<sup>87</sup> Wilde, W.R. (1854) *On the Physical, Moral and Social Condition of the Deaf and Dumb*, 5.

<sup>88</sup> E.g. “Ongelukkige” in *Het Vlaamsche Nieuws*, November 15, 1916; “Un bienfaiteur des sourds-muets” in *La Libre Belgique*, November 23, 1925; “Nos sociétés” in *L’Echo de la Presse*, July 3, 1916.

<sup>89</sup> Joyner, H. (2004) *From Pity to Pride*, 10.

<sup>90</sup> E.g. Ducloux, M. (1841) *Institut des sourds-muets à Yverdon: projet de décret présenté au Grand Conseil par le Conseil d’Etat, exposé des motifs du Conseil d’Etat [...]*. Lausanne: Marc Ducloux, 25.

<sup>91</sup> Butler, W. (1807) “Intellectual Comfort Afforded to Deaf and Dumb” *The Gentleman’s Magazine and the Historical Chronicle for the Year 1807*. London: J. Nichols and Son, v. 77, 36.

than through sight.<sup>92</sup> In 1804, Wolke developed a similar argument: the sense of hearing enabled a more profound knowledge about things and concepts than was obtainable by only viewing them. Consequently, a blind person could become a “rational, skilled, cultivated, and clever human being [...], whereas the deaf must remain a sensual, ignorant animal-person”.<sup>93</sup> However, Rodenbach emphasized the importance of social class in this regard: for the poor, deaf-mutism was to be preferred above blindness as deafness and mutism posed no obstacle to exercising a simple trade. For persons of means, on the other hand, blindness was less disagreeable.<sup>94</sup> Pierre-Armand Dufau (1795-1877), director of the Royal Institution for Blind Youth in Paris, recapitulates as follows: “*Sous le rapport de la formation de la raison, du développement de l’intelligence, rien ne remplace le langage; mais pour les relations sociales pour les nécessités de la vie positive, rien non plus ne saurait remplacer la vue.*” (In respect to the formation of reason, the development of intelligence, there is no substitute for language; but for social relations required for a positive life, there is no substitute for sight).<sup>95</sup> Thus, while the blind were supposed to be worse off physically, because they were more reliant on assistance and had more difficulties in obtaining a livelihood, the deaf were believed to have more mental difficulties. Although they were able to learn a profession by imitation, and thus provide for their subsistence, the difficulties in acquiring knowledge left them in a state that was “*hardly even human*”.<sup>96</sup> And even the physical possibilities of deaf people were often questioned. Joyner describes how some hearing people assessed deaf people as helpless, leading “*an idle, immoral, and vagrant life in constant poverty*”, always “*a burden to themselves, their friends, and to the community and a standing tax upon the public for their entire lives*”.<sup>97</sup>

In sum, deaf people were in an unenviable position. Like animals, they were considered to be unreasonable and immoral, living in a state of utter loneliness and unhappiness, deprived of the social contact and love of the people around them, with the only consolation being that they were physically able to provide for their own livelihoods. Accord-

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<sup>92</sup> Rodenbach, A. (1855) *Les aveugles et les sourds-muets: histoire, instruction, éducation, biographie*, 198 & 204.

<sup>93</sup> Wolke, C.H. (1804) *Anweisung wie Kinder und Stumme one Zeitverlust und Auf Naturgemäße Weise zum Verstehen und Sprechen zum Lesen und Schreiben oder zu Sprachkenntnissen und Begriffen zu Bringen Sind, mit Hilfsmitteln für Taubstumme, Schwerhörige und Blinde Nebst Einigen Sprach-Aufsätzen*. Leipzig: Siegfried Lebrecht Crusins, 417-8. Quoted and translated in: Verstraete, P. (2014) “Happiness Disabled: Sensory Disabilities, Happiness and the Rise of Educational Expertise in the Nineteenth Century” *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education*, 50/4, 486.

<sup>94</sup> Rodenbach, A. (1828) *Lettre sur les aveugles: faisains suite à celle de Diderot [etc]*. Brussels: J. Sacré, 24.

<sup>95</sup> Dufau, P.-A. (1850) *Des aveugles. Considérations sur leur état physique moral et intellectuel [...]*. Paris: Jules Renouaerd et Cic., 85-6.

<sup>96</sup> Verstraete, P. (2014) “Happiness Disabled”, 486.

<sup>97</sup> Joyner, H. (2004) *From Pity to Pride*, 14. The extent to which deaf individuals were able to provide for their livelihoods is discussed in Chapter 4.

ing to Abbé Charles-Michel de l'Épée, founder of the first deaf school in France in 1760, these stereotypes meant that “parents held themselves disgraced by the fact of having a deaf and dumb child, and concealed it from the eyes of the world”.<sup>98</sup> Or even worse, he “assures us that even in his time there were still regions where one killed, at the age of three or later, all children who could not hear, nor talk”.<sup>99</sup> Although the killing of one's deaf child was probably a less obvious response from parents, other sources confirm the parents' anguish when they realized their child was deaf. In 1915, John D. Wright, founder and principal of the Wright Oral School for the Deaf in New York, published a book entitled *What the Mother of a Deaf Child Ought to Know*. In the book, Wright wrote down suggestions for mothers preparing their deaf child for oral education. Although the book is first and foremost intended as a plea for oral education, a letter in the preface of the book written by Lucile M. Moore, the mother of a deaf child, catches one's attention. She described her reaction when she found out her child was deaf:

*“Can you for the moment put yourselves into our place? Suppose you are just the ordinary American parents, perhaps living far from the center of things. You know in a hazy way that there are deaf and blind and other afflicted people - perhaps you have seen some of them. Now, into your home comes disease or a sudden awakening to the meaning of existing conditions, and you find that your child is deaf. At first your thought is of physicians; they fail you. Advice from friends and advertisements from quacks pour in upon you; still you find no comfort and no help. You stop talking to the child. What is the use? He cannot hear you! You pity him - oh infinitely! [...] You try one thing after another, floundering desperately in your effort to discover what radical step must be taken to meet this emergency.”<sup>100</sup>*

Similarly, an article published in 1941 in *Onze Vriend*, a deaf journal issued in Belgium from 1925 onwards, expresses the belief that it was “impossible for anyone to imagine the despair felt by a mother when she realizes her child is deaf”. According to the article, this despair was in no way exaggerated as “the deaf-mutism will have an immense and fatal impact on the further intellectual and moral development of her child and will be a terrible disability in the struggle for existence in later life”.<sup>101</sup> This quote illustrates how the belief that deaf people were intellectually and morally disadvantaged still prevailed in the middle of the twentieth century, and was even shared by people who were deaf themselves. Once they realized their child was deaf, as Lucile Moore states, many parents probably turned to physicians in the hope they could come up with a cure.

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<sup>98</sup> Burnet, J.R. (1835) *Tales of the Deaf and Dumb: With Miscellaneous Poems*. Newark: Benjamin Olds, 48.

<sup>99</sup> Berthier, F. (1840) *Les sourds-muets, avant et depuis l'abbé de l'Épée*. Paris: Ledoyen, 7.

<sup>100</sup> Wright, J.D. (1915) *What the Mother of a Deaf Child Ought to Know*. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, x-xi.

<sup>101</sup> (1941) “Voor onze hoorende lezers. Het doofstomme kind” *Onze Vriend*, 17.



### 3.4.1 Deafness in need of a cure?

Since its development in the 1970s, cochlear implantation, which enables deaf people to hear sounds and learn spoken language, has been at the forefront of a cultural battleground between the hearing and deaf communities. For the hearing, a cochlear implant is viewed as a means to overcome exclusion and cast off a disability status. Deaf communities, on the other hand, see it as a threat to their culture and language.<sup>102</sup> The essence of the debate can be traced back to the question: is deafness a disability that needs curing?

Several sources suggest that this question was already disputed in the nineteenth century – despite the fact that effective medical treatments were lacking. Hanna Joyner describes how physicians and parents of deaf children in the mid-nineteenth century were so overwhelmed by images and stereotypes of deaf people as dependent and defective, that they believed any possibility of a cure was worth the effort. According to one American doctor: “*If only a small number of these [deaf persons] can be relieved, it is imperative on the medical men [to try to cure] the class of cases in which treatment promises to be successful.*” The hearing society felt that the suffering of deaf people should be alleviated as much as possible.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, Van Cleve and Crouch describe how in the past Western physicians believed deafness to be a malady, a condition which needed to be eliminated before deaf people could live a normal and healthy life.<sup>104</sup>

Before modern medicine developed in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, conditions such as blindness, deafness and insanity were viewed as afflictions sent by God and therefore incurable. However, the eighteenth-century Enlightenment cultivated the belief that impairments had a reasonable and biological explanation. Accordingly, doctors came to think that impairments were defects which could be rectified.<sup>105</sup> Nonetheless, despite a certain amount of knowledge about the anatomy of the inner ear, even late in the nineteenth century physicians had only a rudimentary understanding of the origin and types of deafness. This resulted in discussions on how deafness should be treated and professionals, empirics and quacks alike offered a wide array of cures for hearing loss. From their study into British mid-nineteenth-century advertisements offering cures for hearing loss, Ross, Lyon and Cathart deduce that many treatments in-

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<sup>102</sup> Grant, S.E. (2008) “The Silent Debate: The Controversy Over the Cochlear Implant and how it is Changing the Deaf Community” *ProQuest*, 1; Leigh, I. (2009) *A Lens on Deaf Identities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 151-60.

<sup>103</sup> Joyner, H. (2004) *From Pity to Pride*, 14.

<sup>104</sup> Van Cleve, J.V. & Crouch, B. (1989) *A Place of Their Own*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 6.

<sup>105</sup> Mirzoeff, N. (1992) “The Silent Mind. Learning from Deafness” *History Today*, 42/7, 21.

volved taking pills and potions.<sup>106</sup> Similar advertisements were published in Belgian newspapers. In July 1916, the *Gazet van Brussels* reported experiments to cure deaf-muteness caused by war trauma. Using the root of the ipecacuanha plant, scientists tried to induce a vomiting attack, which would simulate the nervous attack experienced during war. According to the advertisement, several deaf-mute persons were cured this way.<sup>107</sup> However, the curability of deaf-muteness was not uncontested, as an advertisement in *Le Courier de l'Escaut* suggests. According to the advertiser, Dr Dalton of the Aural Institute, deafness could be cured by his “new invention” except in the case of congenitally deaf people, “who are incurable”.<sup>108</sup>

In contrast to these rather harmless ‘household remedies’, other treatments were more invasive. Many treatments were based on the idea that deafness was the result of an ear blockage, which needed to be removed through purification, flushing or syringing various fluids in the child’s ears, or even through aural injections and the insertion of sharp tools.<sup>109</sup> It goes without saying that such methods were not only ineffective, but also dangerous and could even lead to death.<sup>110</sup> Several nineteenth-century scientists pinned their hopes on galvanism, or electroshock therapy, to cure deafness. Harlan Lane described some of the methods used by Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard (1774-1838), the doctor at the Paris institute for the deaf:

*“He started by applying electricity to the ears of some pupils, since an Italian surgeon had recently found that a frog’s leg would contract if touched by charged metal... He also placed leeches on the necks of some of the pupils in the hope that local bleeding would help somehow. Six students had their eardrums pierced, but the operation was painful and fruitless, and he desisted. Not soon enough for Christian Dietz who died following his treatment.”<sup>111</sup>*

Later on, Itard realized the harmful effects of his actions and came to realize that “one can regard a cure, properly speaking, for congenital deafness as impossible, so rare is it to render them a sense which nature has pitilessly denied them.”<sup>112</sup> Medical historian Ylva Söderfeldt described similar experiments with electroshocks conducted by Ernst Adolph Eschke (1766-1811) on pupils of the Royal Deaf-Mute Asylum in Berlin. Eschke too was unable to bring about improvements in the hearing of the students. On the contrary, several stu-

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<sup>106</sup> Ross, L., Lyon, P. & Cathart C. (2014) “Pills, Potions and Devices: Treatments for Hearing Loss Advertised in Mid-nineteenth Century British Newspapers” *Social History of Medicine*, 27/3, 551.

<sup>107</sup> Article in *Gazet van Brussels*, July 5, 1916.

<sup>108</sup> Article in *Le Courier de l'Escaut*, November 11, 1900.

<sup>109</sup> Joyner, H. (2004) *From Pity to Pride*, 19.

<sup>110</sup> Mirzoeff, N. (1992) “The Silent Mind”, 21.

<sup>111</sup> Lane, H. (1989) *When the Mind Hears: A History of the Deaf*. New York: Random House, 132.

<sup>112</sup> Terry, J. & Urla, J.L. (1995) *Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference in Science and Popular Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 55.

dents suffered side effects such as pain, bleeding and faintness. It is unclear whether similar experiments were held in Belgium. In July 1896, the newspaper *Het Laatste Nieuws* reported that Dr Helmoortel, associated with the Institute for Deaf-Mute Girls in Brussels, executed “*eene bijzondere studie op de ooren van verscheidene dezer kinderen*” (a special study on the ears of several of these children). The hearing of five girls was said to have improved considerably. The newspaper commended the efforts of the physician as “he rendered an invaluable service to humanity”. Whether the “special study” entailed electroshock therapy is difficult to assess.<sup>113</sup>

How deaf people received these different types of treatments is mostly unknown. Based on the huge number of newspaper advertisements, Ross, Lyon and Cathart estimate that there were many deaf people looking for a cure. After all, the supply was geared to the demand.<sup>114</sup> However, Söderfeldt’s article suggests that the opposite was true. In 1803 Eschke published a report about his experiments with electroshocks, which contained considerable references to the opinions of the test subjects. Contrary to the view of the hearing society that deaf people had nothing to lose in searching for a cure, Eschke’s pupils hardly ever mentioned any regrets about their condition. According to Söderfeldt, they did not necessarily desire to be cured, but instead claimed deafness as a variation of the human character.<sup>115</sup> Similarly, Joyner illustrated by means of mid-nineteenth-century egodocuments that many deaf children felt no need to find a cure. Ellen Martin, who attended the Pennsylvania school for the deaf (United States) in the 1830s, wrote in a letter to her cousin in 1842: “*I assure you that I never regret being deprived of my hearing in my life, as I trust that God knows what was best, and that I am as happy as you would wish*”.<sup>116</sup>

Both personal testimonies date back to the period in which deaf education had already been established. By that time, the conviction had grown that deaf education was another, more effective way to overcome the negative stereotypes associated with deafness. Moreover, the pupils of the Royal Deaf-Mute Asylum in Berlin and Ellen Martin grew up in a time when the deaf community was in full development (see 6.3.2). The wish for a cure was probably less deep-seated in these children than in deaf children who grew up without education, who may have never met other deaf people and for whom being deaf was still a source of discrimination instead of identification.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Article in *Het Laatste Nieuws*, July 9, 1896.

<sup>114</sup> Ross, L., Lyon, P. & Cathart C. (2014) “Pills, Potions and Devices”, 553-4.

<sup>115</sup> Söderfeldt, Y. (2013) “The Galvanic Treatment of Deafness and the Trials at the Berlin Royal Deaf-Mute Asylum in 1802” *European Archives of Oto-Rhino-Laryngology*, 270, 1953-8.

<sup>116</sup> Joyner, H. (2004) *From Pity to Pride*, 33.

<sup>117</sup> Similarly Patrick Schmidt argued that those people with impairments who easily found a job or who were accepted in high society did not consider a medical cure as the only way to social inclusion. For those living in

## 3.5 Deaf education

### 3.5.1 Prerequisites for the development of deaf schools

Schools for the deaf and blind were the earliest ‘special’ schools to be developed in Europe and the United States in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The early establishment of institutions for people with sensory impairments suggests that deaf and blind people were believed to be more in need of intervention than those who were physically or intellectually disabled, or otherwise were deemed more suitable for receiving education.<sup>118</sup> The belief that deaf people were denied access to heaven because they could not hear the word of God, outlined above, was an important incentive for educationalists to look for ways to educate deaf persons. These religious concerns explain why initially religious men in particular devoted themselves to deaf education. Benedictine monk Pedro Ponce de León (1520?-1584) in Spain, Abbé Charles-Michel de l’Épée (1712-1789) in France, reverend Henri Daniel Guyot (1753-1828) in the Netherlands, canon Pierre-Joseph Triest (1760-1836) in Belgium and reverend Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet (1822-1902) in the United States were among the first to found institutions for the education of deaf children. Besides religious motives, incentives for educating the deaf and blind were also stimulated by developments in medicine, philosophy, linguistics and politics.<sup>119</sup> The previous section showed how, from the eighteenth century onwards, impairments were no longer attributed to supernatural forces but were explained from a scientific perspective. As a result, people who were previously perceived as incurable and unimprovable now qualified for treatment or some form of rehabilitation.<sup>120</sup> Education was advocated as the best way to treat people with sensory disabilities.<sup>121</sup> Moreover, philosophical discussions at the time were characterized by a great interest in the senses. Historian Mark M. Smith describes the Enlightenment’s view on the senses as follows: “*Sensory experiences granted access to knowing and the senses were con-*

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poverty, on the other hand, experiences of marginalization might have been very different and for them the quest for a cure may have been very real. Schmidt, P. (2013) “No Need for Assimilation? Narratives about Disabled Persons and Their Social Integration in Eighteenth-Century Periodicals” In: Barsch, S., Klein, A. & Verstraete, P. (eds.) *The Imperfect Historian. Disability Histories in Europe*. Bern: Peter Lang, 41-58.

<sup>118</sup> Hutchison, I. (2007) *A History of Disability in Nineteenth-Century Scotland*. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 179. People with physical impairments were left to fend for themselves with poor relief as their only option and the intellectually impaired were considered not to be in need of education but of imprisonment or treatment.

<sup>119</sup> Verstraete, P. & Hellinckx, W. (2009) *Met een handicap naar school*, 18-23.

<sup>120</sup> Linton, S. (1998) *Claiming Disability. Knowledge and Identity*. New York: New York University Press, 48.

<sup>121</sup> The rationalization of disabilities led to the development of a ‘care’ industry consisting of a variety of institutions, asylums and schools. Section 7.2 discusses these non-educational types of care.

sidered portals to physical and moral science and truth.”<sup>122</sup> However, lacking one of the senses did not necessarily imply that knowledge was unattainable: “Because the senses worked collaboratively, one sense always profits from the lack of another”.<sup>123</sup> In other words, certain senses could assume the functions of another sense. On this subject, Abbé de l’Épée wrote in 1784: “It was simply a matter of sending through their eyes into their mind what enters ours through our ears”.<sup>124</sup> Thus, although deaf people lacked the primary channel for the acquisition of knowledge, a replacement could be found in their vision and in a language of gestures. Simultaneously, philosophers and linguists contemplated the origin of language. In their discussions, they speculated how sign languages may have been the first true languages as gestures express a more direct connection to the things they refer to than spoken words. Therefore, the establishment of deaf education evolved in tandem with and benefitted from debates on the origin of language.<sup>125</sup> However, the idea that deaf and blind people could be educated was not only present in scientific circles. It was also supported by national governments who, in an attempt to combat poverty and mendicancy, saw the deaf schools as a means to turn deaf people into useful and productive members of society.<sup>126</sup> Especially because statistics began to reveal that a considerable number of deaf people had no access to education and employment. Moreover, Verstraete discusses how deaf people were believed to contradict the ruling political ideals of liberty and equality. Sicard, successor to Abbé de l’Épée, wrote in this regard: “And under the reign of laws, when the sacred words of liberty and equality are written everywhere, there are still men born who are sentenced to oppression by the mere vice of being born.” In a political landscape where people could act and communicate freely, deaf people were seen as “anachronisms” and “statues in remembrance of political rigidity”. Through education, however, they could be “freed and made active”.<sup>127</sup> In Belgium, this government support resulted in, among other things,

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<sup>122</sup> Smith, M.M. (2007) *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 31.

<sup>123</sup> Riskin, J. (2002) *Science in the Age of Sensibility: The Sentimental Empiricists of the French Enlightenment*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 42.

<sup>124</sup> De l’Épée, C.M. (1784) *La véritable manière d’instruire les sourds et muets, confirmée par une longue expérience*. Paris: Nyon, 1.

<sup>125</sup> Armstrong, D.E. & Wilcox, S.E. (2007) *The Gestural Origin of Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 5-17. Deaf schools in Flanders took over the sign language system developed by Abbé de l’Épée. Most likely, Abbé de l’Épée unified the existing varieties of signed language in one system for the purpose of teaching deaf pupils.

<sup>126</sup> Verstraete, P. (2009) “The Politics of Activity: Emergence and Development of Educational Programs for People with Disabilities between 1750 and 1860” *History of Education Review*, 38/1, 81-3.

<sup>127</sup> Verstraete, P. (2009) “Savage Solitude: The Problematisation of Disability at the Turn of the Eighteenth Century” *Paedagogica Historica*, 45/3, 282.

the financial intervention of municipalities in the payment of school tuition fees for poor deaf children from 1836 onwards (see 2.1.1.4).<sup>128</sup>

This combination of religious, medical, philosophical, linguistic and political factors created the right conditions for the establishment of deaf schools from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards. Equally important were the motives of educationalists and founders of deaf schools in taking concrete action and starting a deaf school. The attitudes to deaf people discussed above were crucial in this regard. Animal-like and devoid of reason and morals, deaf people, and also blind people for that matter, were considered outsiders in society who were “reduced to a horrible state of solitude”.<sup>129</sup> However, there was a way they could be freed and returned to society: education rescue and raise deaf people to some form of humankind. Schooling was considered essential for bringing deaf persons, in the words of a nineteenth-century contemporary, “from darkness to light”.<sup>130</sup> It was a means to “render moins pénible la condition d’un si grand nombre d’infortunés, qui privés de la parole et de l’ouïe, semblaient condamnés par la nature à vivre solitaires au sein même de la société” (alleviate the condition of so many unfortunates who, deprived of speech and hearing, seem doomed by nature to live solitary even in the heart of society).<sup>131</sup>

To convince the general public of the necessity and benefits of deaf schools, the directors often organized public demonstrations of their ‘successes’. In January 1925, the Flemish newspaper *Vooruit* announced there would be a performance by a teacher and some students of the Institute for Deaf-Mute and Blind Children in Berchem. The exercises performed by the children would, according to the journalist, be “the best proof of the high-quality education” of the school for those “underprivileged by nature”.<sup>132</sup> Similarly, in 1924 *De Volksgazet* reported on a visit to the Institute for Deaf Girls in Antwerp. Before entering the institution, the author reflected how, centuries ago, deaf people were considered “idiots, children possessed by the devil [...] excluded from the community of the Church”. Fortunately these “dark times had past” and now “great salvation was brought to the million of deaf-mutes” through education. The journalist reported he was astonished by the reading and speaking skills of the pupils. The article ended

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<sup>128</sup> In exchange for financial support, the state required regular inspections of the deaf schools – although they were private institutions – by an inspector of the offices of benevolence and inspectors of the primary education system. (1912?) *Statistique générale de la Belgique: Exposé de la situation du Royaume de 1876 à 1900*. Brussels: Piquaert.

<sup>129</sup> Verstraete, P. (2009) “Savage Solitude”, 269–89.

<sup>130</sup> Pettengill, B.D. (1872) “The Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb” *American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb*, 17–8, 22.

<sup>131</sup> Piroux, J. (1845) *Institut des sourds-muets de Nanca*. Nancy: Raybois, 60.

<sup>132</sup> “Volksontwikkeling door het Willemsfonds” in *Vooruit*, January 24, 1925.

with an expression of gratitude to the teachers as “they save children and bring light in the darkness and bestow those unfavoured by nature with happiness.”<sup>133</sup>

It was not only the hearing world that had high expectations of the possibilities of deaf education. So did the deaf pupils. Based on nineteenth-century student writings, Edwards argued that students were excited about attending a deaf school. Having felt like outsiders when they saw hearing children go to school and being unable to read and write in an increasingly literate society, attending a deaf school was considered a way to change all this. In the deaf schools, students were able to “*come out of the isolation of hearing families and into a new community. There, they would not be left out of conversations anymore and their questions would get answers.*”<sup>134</sup> It offered them “*a place of their own*”, where deafness was the norm.<sup>135</sup> An autobiographical letter by Charles Steenhuyze, a deaf man who graduated in 1861 from the Royal Institute Spermalie for the Deaf and Blind in Bruges (Belgium), illustrates a similar wish to go to school. “*Ik zag wel dat mijne broeders boeken hadden en alle dagen naar de school gingen, ik begeerde ook boeken te hebben om naar de school te gaen [...].*” (I could see my brothers had books and went to school every day, I wished to have books too and go to school).<sup>136</sup> The importance of deaf schools was also expressed in an article published in the deaf journal *Onze Vriend* in 1941: “*Kunt ge U den schrijnenden nood van het doofstomme kind inbeelden? Hebt ge ooit nagedacht wat het is doof en stom te zijn? Nog niet!... dan hebt ge ook nog nooit aangevoeld dat de doofstomheid een der vreeslijkste kwalen is die een mensch kunnen overkomen, dat een doofstomme recht heeft op medelijden en meevoelen.*” (Can you imagine the desperate need of the deaf-mute child? Have you ever thought about what it means to be deaf and dumb? Not yet!... Then you have never realized that deaf-muteness is one of the most terrible ailments a person can experience, that a deaf-mute deserves pity and compassion). However, the article stated, the situation changed in the nineteenth century and now deaf children were able to taste “*de lachende lenteweelde van het zonnig levensgeluk*” (the smiling abundance of spring that comes from the sunny happiness in life) because of the “scientific expertise, the experience, willpower, patience and dedication of those who have made it their task in life to return the deaf and dumb to the hearing society, by special education in deaf-mute institutions.”<sup>137</sup> Tellings and Tijsseling quote a deaf boy who attended the Dutch Guyot Institute for the Deaf at the beginning of the nineteenth century, based on a letter the boy had written to the institute after graduation. The ex-pupil praised the principal

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<sup>133</sup> “Een bezoek aan het doofstommengesticht voor meisjes” in *De Volksgazet*, February 27, 1924.

<sup>134</sup> Edwards, R.A.R. (2012) *Words Made Flesh*, 59-60.

<sup>135</sup> Burch, S. (2004) “Double Jeopardy: Women, Deafness and Deaf Education” In: Brueggemann, J. (ed.) *Literacy and Deaf People. Cultural and Contextual Perspectives*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 59.

<sup>136</sup> Published in: Verstraete, P. & Hellinckx, W. (2009) *Met een handicap naar school*, 11.

<sup>137</sup> (1941) “Voor onze hoorende lezers. Het doofstomme kind” *Onze Vriend*, 17.

of the school because “now I am filled with happiness that I can read and write. This shows me that I am not stupid. I myself think that you have brought me this. For you have developed my powers of reason, you have given me religious knowledge and other necessary knowledge so that I am now a useful member of society”.<sup>138</sup>

However, Padden and Humphries point to the conflicting legacy of nineteenth-century special schools. On the one hand, they brought education to deaf children and united them in a community. However, contrary to this community feeling, were feelings of solitude and deprivation. Attending a deaf school implied deaf children had to leave their homes. So, instead of living and working alongside family and neighbours, they were removed from their homes and workplaces and became ‘inmates’ of an institution and objects of study. Deaf schools claimed the entire lives of deaf students, housing them for months at a time, regulating all their movements in the interests of education and rehabilitation.<sup>139</sup> A quote by Léon Vaïsse (1807-1884), director of the Paris Institution for the Deaf, illustrates this: “The office of the teacher of the deaf-mute is more analogous to that of the physician than to that of the professor.”<sup>140</sup> Testimonies of deaf people, collected by Maurice Buyens in 2005, show how pupils who attended a deaf school in the first half of the twentieth century experienced mixed feelings of happiness and aversion.<sup>141</sup> Remigius Voet, born in 1921, attended the Institute for the Deaf and Blind in Bruges from 1928 to 1941. He describes how he loved being in the institute. He even preferred school to his home because at home he had “trouble talking with his parents, brothers and sisters”. Remigius was the only deaf person in his family and none of them “really knew signs”. But although the pupils were generally positive about their education and the friendships they made with other deaf students, they also expressed feelings of sadness because they could not go home and were restricted in what they

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<sup>138</sup> Tellings, A. & Tijsseling, C. (2005) “An Unhappy and Utterly Pitiabile Creature? Life and Self-Images of Deaf People in the Netherlands at the Time of the Founding Fathers of Deaf Education” *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 10/2, 199.

<sup>139</sup> Padden, C. & Humphries, T. (2005) *Inside Deaf Culture*. Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 29-33.

<sup>140</sup> Vaïsse, L. (1874) “Practical Suggestions Relating to the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb” In: Fay, E.A. (ed.) *American Annals of the Deaf and Dumb*. Washington: Gibson Brothers, v.19, 13. The segregative character of the deaf schools was not uncontested and several people, such as Charles-Louis Carton, director of the Royal Institute Spermalie for the Deaf and Blind in Bruges, argued that the education of deaf children should be organized within the domestic circle and ordinary schooling system. Until the end of the eighteenth century, these ideas were largely ignored. Verstraete, P. & Hellinckx, W. (2009) *Met een handicap naar school*, 28-9.

<sup>141</sup> Emily K. Abel showed that opposition to boarding school placement was not uncommon among mothers as well. Based on the letters of American mothers from the first half of the twentieth century, she shows that mothers worried that their deaf children would grow away from them and that the school management would not understand the characteristics and needs of their offspring. Abel, E.K. (2006) “‘Like Ordinary Hearing Children’: Mothers Raising Offspring according to oralist Dictates” In: Brueggemann, B.J. & Burch, S. (eds.) *Women and Deafness: Double Visions*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 130-46.



were allowed to do at school. Ilona Ghijsels, a deaf woman who graduated from the Royal Institute for Deaf Girls in Ghent in 1959, describes how she was often distressed because she could not go home. The pupils only left the institution twice within a three-month period. She also narrates how visitors came to see how education was organized within the school. On these occasions, teachers asked the pupils questions, but only “the smart ones”. Ilona did not agree with this as it would give the impression that “all of us were equally bright”. Leontine Ruyssinck, pupil of the Royal Institute for Deaf Girls in Brussels from 1937 to 1949, recounts how they were not allowed to use signs. If they did use sign language, points were subtracted from their scores and they were punished.<sup>142</sup> Several other testimonies report of the prohibition against using signs. Deaf pupils had to comply with the ideas of hearing educationalists that only through speech and lip-reading could deaf people assimilate into a hearing world.<sup>143</sup>

The prohibition of sign language use among deaf pupils needs to be interpreted in the context of a *war* of methods within deaf education. Indeed, while the belief that deaf people could be educated had become common property among nineteenth-century educationalists, the question remained as to whether deaf individuals needed to be educated through sign language (manualism) or speech and lip-reading (oralism). The former was predominantly advocated by deaf people, the latter by hearing society. By the late nineteenth century, the battle had been won by the oralists and it was only in the second half of the twentieth century that sign language regained its privileged position. However, the disagreement over methods was also a reflection of the hearing society’s views on the necessary *normalization* of deaf people. By the mid-nineteenth century, the deaf community was in full expansion (see 6.3.2). Confronted with the development of a separate deaf culture, oralists believed that deaf people needed to be ‘restored’ to the hearing world and made ‘normal’ through speech. In combination with the spread of a eugenic mindset, this meant a concerted attack on deaf people and their community.

The debate about manualism and oralism is central to the history of deaf people. However, several scholars have described the development of oralism and its consequences for deaf people from an (inter)national perspective and for Belgium in particular. For more on the topic, I refer to their publications.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Buyens, M. (2005) *De dove persoon, zijn gebarentaal en het dovenonderwijs*, 95-8.

<sup>143</sup> In 6.3.2, I will argue that deaf adults did not simply submit to these ideas.

<sup>144</sup> From an (inter)national perspective: Burch, S. (2002) *Signs of Resistance. American Deaf Cultural History, 1900 to World War II*. New York/London: New York University Press; Branson, J. & Miller, D. (2002) *Damned for Their Difference*; Burch, S. (2001) “Reading between the Signs. Defending Deaf Culture in Early Twentieth-Century America” in: Umansky, L. & Longmore, P.K. (eds.) *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*. New York/London: New York University Press, 214-35; Hutchison, I. (2007) “Oralism: A Sign of the Times? The Contest for Deaf Communication in Education Provision in Late Nineteenth-Century Scotland” *European Review of*

### 3.5.2 The organisation of deaf education in Ghent

After some small-scale initiatives at the end of the eighteenth century, deaf education got off to a good start in Belgium in the early nineteenth century.<sup>145</sup> Between 1792 and 1852, deaf schools were established in ten Belgian municipalities: Doornik (1792), Liège (1819), Ghent (1820 and 1825), Brussels (1834 and 1835), Moorslede-Ieper (1834-1837), Bruges (1836), Namur (1829 and 1836), Mons (1838), Maaseik (1844) and Antwerp (1852). All the institutions, except for the one in Liège, were set up and managed by religious congregations.<sup>146</sup>

The spread of the idea that deaf children could and should be educated, together with the establishment of a deaf school in each Belgian province, resulted in a growing number of educated deaf people as the nineteenth century progressed. Orest Claeys has calculated the number of pupils in the Belgian deaf schools from 1829 to 1882, based on the combination of figures from different publications.<sup>147</sup> The *Exposé de la situation du Royaume* of 1861-1875 (published in 1885) and 1876-1900 (published in 1912) also published the number of pupils in each institution on a yearly basis. By combining the information from these various sources, I have an estimate of the number of pupils in the deaf schools from 1829 to 1900.<sup>148</sup> The numbers are presented in table 3.5.

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*History*, 14/4, 481-501; Quartararo, A.T. (1993) "Integration or Segregation: The Dilemma of the French Deaf Community and the Goals of Republican Education, 1880-1900" *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History*, 20, 315-24. With a focus on Belgium: Beelaert, B., Bruyneel, C. & Leeman K. (2009) *Vive la parole? Milaan 1880 als scharniermoment in het dovenonderwijs*. Ghent: Fevlado-Diversus; De Clerck, G.A.M. (2009) *I Don't Worry Because I Have My Education. Exploring Dynamics of Deaf Identity, Empowerment and Agency in a Chain of Empirical and Theoretical Studies*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished master's dissertation); Verstraete, P. & Hellinckx, W. (2013) *Met een handicap naar school*; Demuynck, B. (2009) *Hulpmiddelen met een geschiedenis (1800-1985) Doven en Blindeninstituut Spermalie*. Bruges: Archief Charles-Louis Carton; Demuynck, B. (2011) "175 jaar doven- en blindeninstituut in West-Vlaanderen" *Biekorf*, 111/4, 419-437.

<sup>145</sup> De Baere reports that a certain Marie-Joseph De Brabandere, living in Heule, had a reputation for being a good teacher of deaf-mute children. Josephus De Caigny, born deaf around 1750, was one of her pupils and worked as a private teacher himself. Later, he became teacher in a school for deaf children in Meulebeke. When Josephus could no longer teach due to family circumstances, the school ceased to exist. De Baere, P. (1968) "Josephus Caigny Van Pittem. De dove dovenleraar" *Biekorf*, 69, 94-6; De Baere, P. (1969) "Het instituut der doofstomme en blinde van Moorslede" *Biekorf*, 7-8, 193-202; Claeys, O. (1976) "De eerste decennia van dovenonderwijs in schoolverband in België" In: *Liber Amicorum Prof. Dr. V. D'Espallier*. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 187-209.

<sup>146</sup> The establishment and development of the seven Flemish deaf schools is reviewed in detail by: Buyens, M. (2005) *De dove persoon, zijn gebarentaal en het dovenonderwijs*.

<sup>147</sup> Claeys, O. (1976) "De eerste decennia van dovenonderwijs", 205.

<sup>148</sup> A comparison of the numbers in the *Exposés* and the table drawn up by O. Claeys for 1868 and 1882 shows that the numbers in the publications differ slightly. For 1868, the numbers in Claeys' table are generally lower than in the *Exposé*. In 1882, there is less variation, with the exception of deaf boys in the institution of Bruges

**Table 3.5** Population within the Belgian deaf schools according to gender (1829-1900), in N

	1829		1836		1844		1853		1868		1882		1900	
	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M
Liège			15	23			16	25	21	27	40	47	54	64
Ghent	47	21	64	38			39	69	50	33	83	91	82	98
Brussels			24	19			38	27	52	26	142	126	168	124
Moorslede			15	7										
Bruges							34	45	64	55	88	102	115	104
Namur							12	15			38	57	46	64
Doornik						7		4						
Mons						26	7	6						
Maaseik							26		13	20	26	23	40	24
Antwerp										16		63	84*	65

Source: Claeys, O. (1976) *De eerste decennia van dovenonderwijs in schoolverband in België*, 205. *Exposé de la situation du Royaume* of 1861-1875 and 1876-1900.

Notes: Separate numbers are given for women (W) and men (M). \*The institute for deaf girls in Antwerp was established in 1884.

The table shows that the most spectacular increase in the student population took place between 1868 and 1882. This increase can be explained by an amendment in 1876 to the local government act of 1836, which stipulated that municipalities had to mediate in the expenses for the care and maintenance of the deaf. In 1876 a provincial common fund was set up, to which each municipality had to contribute according to its population size. This common fund paid 75 percent of the placement and maintenance costs of a deaf child, while the municipality only had to pay the remaining 25 percent (2.1.1.4). As the financial burden of municipalities decreased, municipalities were more inclined to encourage the placement of deaf children in an institution. So legal and financial considerations, rather than educational motives, may explain the sharp increase in the number of deaf children that were educated. Without an indication of the total number of deaf children of school age, it is impossible to calculate the ratio of educated and uneducated deaf children. Nonetheless, that the number of educated deaf people increased steadily in the course of the nineteenth century can be concluded from the growing numbers of pupils (table 3.5) and the more or less fixed number of deaf individuals through time (table 2.9).

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(107 according to the *Exposé*, compared to 126 according to Claeys). The differences between the two sources suggest that the numbers (in both sources?) are estimates rather than actual counts.

Although most deaf children probably attended a special deaf school, a unique attestation suggests that there may also have been deaf children who attended ordinary primary schools. On March 23, 1866, *Le Courier de l'Escaut* reported that the children in the town of Gellingen had done their First Communion. Among them was a deaf-mute boy “whose intelligence had developed perfectly”. According to the article, the boy attended the local primary school, “just as those who have speech and hearing”.<sup>149</sup> Another option may have been to have a deaf child home-tutored. Since the government did not intervene financially in private education, this was probably a privilege of wealthier families. An advertisement in the newspaper *L'Echo du Parlement* in 1869 suggests that some graduates from a deaf school searched for employment as private teachers.<sup>150</sup>

There were 132 deaf persons in the dataset (46 percent) who attended a deaf school – in the period between 1824 and 1881. Depending on their sex, they either attended the *Institut Royal des Sourdes-Muettes* or the *Institut Royal des Sourds-Muets* – also called the Sint-Gregorius Institute – both situated in Ghent. The institute for deaf girls was set up by the congregation of the Sisters of Charity in Ghent in 1820. Five years later, the Brothers of Charity founded a male counterpart in the same city. In 1829, after a visit from King Willem I, both schools were granted the title of *Royal Institute* – a statute that was reaffirmed in 1835 by the first Belgian King Leopold I. Even today, these institutions are the only special schools for deaf children in East Flanders.<sup>151</sup> The use of the entry lists of both schools to select deaf men and women, and the fact that they were the only deaf schools in the region, explains why the research population only went to Ghent for their education. The remainder of this section therefore focuses on these two institutions. Nonetheless, as far as the methods of education and the care of deaf children are concerned, differences with the other Belgian schools were limited. All the institutions were residential schools, implying that the deaf pupils lived in the institution for most of the year and were offered similar curricula.

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<sup>149</sup> Article in *Le Courier de l'Escaut*, March 23, 1866.

<sup>150</sup> “Sourdes-Muettes” in *L'Echo du Parlement*, October 20, 1869. Teaching in a deaf school was often not an option because of the exclusively religious management of most Belgian deaf schools (see below).

<sup>151</sup> In 1992 both institutions came to a collaboration agreement. The former institute for deaf girls would provide primary education, while the Sint-Gregorius Institute would house a secondary school. Today many deaf children are also educated in ordinary schools. An overview of the educational possibilities for deaf children nowadays is available in: Vermeerbergen, M. & Van Herreweghe, M. (2008) *Wat (geweest/gewenst) is. Organisaties van en voor doven in Vlaanderen bevraagd over 10 thema's*. Ghent: Academia Press, 73-140.

## The Institut Royal des Sourdes-Muettes and Sint-Gregorius Institute

Figure 3.1 Drawing of the *Institut Royal des Sourdes-Muettes*, late nineteenth century



Source: Archive Sisters of Charity, photo collection, Terhaegen/A19

The institutes in Ghent were the first official schools for deaf children in Flanders. Both were established by canon Jozef Triest (1760-1836) and managed by his congregations of the Sisters and Brothers of Charity.

When passing through Paris in 1816, Triest visited the famous *Institut National pour Sourds-Muets*, established by Abbé de l'Épée in 1760. Inspired by the French institute and concerned with the fate of deaf children, in 1819 he sent one of his novices to Paris to learn the education and communication methods of the Paris institute. In 1820 the first Flemish school for deaf girls opened its doors to all girls, born deaf, who were between the ages of 10 and 18. In 1825, after training at the Guyot Institute for the Deaf in Groningen (the Netherlands), the Brothers of Charity established a similar institution for deaf boys.<sup>152</sup> The establishment of the deaf schools reflected the spirit of the times (see 3.5.1) and based on Triest's observation that "*que jusqu'ici il ne s'en trouve pas dans ces provinces, tandis que depuis longtems il en existe dans d'autres pays qui rendent de services Eminens a l'humanité souffrante [...]*"(so far there are none [deaf schools] in these provinces, despite the fact that they have existed in other countries for a long time, providing eminent services for suffering humankind).<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> At the request of the city council of Brussels, Triest founded two more schools in Brussels, one for blind and deaf girls (1834) and one for blind and deaf boys (1835).

<sup>153</sup>Triest, P.J. (1820) *Brief 657*. Ghent: Archive of the Sisters of Charity (letter addressed to the king of the Netherlands).

**Figure 3.2** A deaf child learning to speak at the *Institut Royal des Sourdes-Muettes* in Ghent, 1936



Source: Archive Sisters of Charity, photo collection, foto 1F/Bel/Gent, Terhaegen/16

As the Sisters and Brothers were trained in respectively the deaf schools of Abbé de l'Épée and minister Daniël H. Guyot, the curriculum of both institutes closely resembled their international predecessors. Both institutions followed a teaching method based on signing. As the Sisters applied the Paris signing system, deaf girls were taught in French. The deaf boys, on the other hand, learned a Dutch sign language. By 1867, the Sisters had realized the inconvenience of teaching deaf children a language “which would be of little use in their Flemish environment” and they started to organize lessons in Dutch.<sup>154</sup> The signs, paradoxically, continued to be based on the French signing system. Around the same time, both institutions started to apply a ‘mixed’ method: the instruction of both sign language and speech and lip reading. Shortly after 1880, in response to international developments, they both switched to the purely oral method (figure 3.2).<sup>155</sup>

In contrast to many other deaf schools in Europe and the United States at the time, all the teachers in the deaf schools of Ghent were religious men and women and most likely hearing – both in the period before and after the introduction of oralism. Unless a deaf woman or man decided to become a Sister or Brother of Charity deaf ex-pupils could not

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<sup>154</sup> (1912, 1913) “De eerste doofstommenschool in België” *Caritas*. Ghent: Archive Sisters of Charity.

<sup>155</sup> Buyens, M. (2005) *De dove persoon, zijn gebarentaal en het dovenonderwijs*, 82-90 & 108-12. Joris Van Doorselaere examined the consequences of the transition from a manual to an oral method for the organization of education at the *Institut Royal des Sourdes-Muettes* in Ghent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Van Doorselaere, J. (2013) *Een miskend gebaar. Het Congres van Milaan als breuklijn in de geschiedenis van het Gentse dovenonderwijs ingericht door de Zusters van Liefde*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished master’s dissertation).

teach at the deaf schools.<sup>156</sup> So, whereas in many schools deaf teachers acted as role models for how to live as deaf adults and as important transmitters of deaf culture<sup>157</sup>, this was not the case in Ghent. It was only in the 1960s that lay people started teaching at the schools in Ghent.

The school curriculum more or less consisted of three parts. First, an important part of the girls' and boys' education was focused on religion. The pupils attended Mass daily and received religious instruction. The importance of religion in the school curriculum was an inevitable result of the denominational background of the teachers and school management. However, as discussed above, equally important was the conviction that uneducated deaf persons possessed "no true idea of the Divinity" and were excluded "like the heathen, from the hopes, the consolations, the knowledge even, of Christianity".<sup>158</sup> The Sisters and Brothers therefore considered themselves responsible for the spiritual welfare of their pupils, entrusted by God to lead the deaf children to their salvation.

Secondly, they had more theoretical classes on mathematics, history, geography and language acquisition. Besides sign language – and later on speech and lip reading – pupils were taught to read and write. In this way, the institutions aimed at providing each pupil with a range of communication skills. Because "*le but de l'éducation qui lui es donnée n'est-il pas précisément de lui rouvrir les portes de la société du sein de laquelle il fut exilé, de le rendre à la famille humaine, comme un membre actif et utile?*" (the goal of the education he is given, is it not to re-open the doors of society from which he was exiled, to return him to the human family, as an active and useful member?).<sup>159</sup> The ability to read and write may have opened up new opportunities for communication between deaf children and the hearing people around them. However, a closer look at the level of literacy of the parents and siblings indicates that written communication was often not an option in the parental household. The majority of the educated deaf children had illiterate parents, as 59 percent of the fathers and 65 percent of the mothers were unable to sign

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<sup>156</sup> David Hirsch (1813-1895), teacher at the deaf school of Rotterdam (Netherlands) visited the deaf schools in Flanders in 1866 and wrote a report about his findings. He describes that the school for deaf boys in Ghent had two teachers, brother Bonaventura and brother Juvenalis. However, they were assisted by a man who was deaf. Hirsch describes how he had addressed the appointment of the deaf assistant with the head of the congregation as there were "acknowledged objections to the appointment of deaf-mutes as teachers". According to Hirsch, the head of the congregation was to follow his advice. Hirsch, D. (1868) *Reglement der inrigting voor doofstommen-onderwijs te Rotterdam, over het veertiende jaar van haar bestaan 1866-1867... beneevens mededelingen omtrent de invoering der Duitsche of Ammansche methode van doofstommenonderwijs in België, en andere bijlagen*. Rotterdam: Wyt, 21-3.

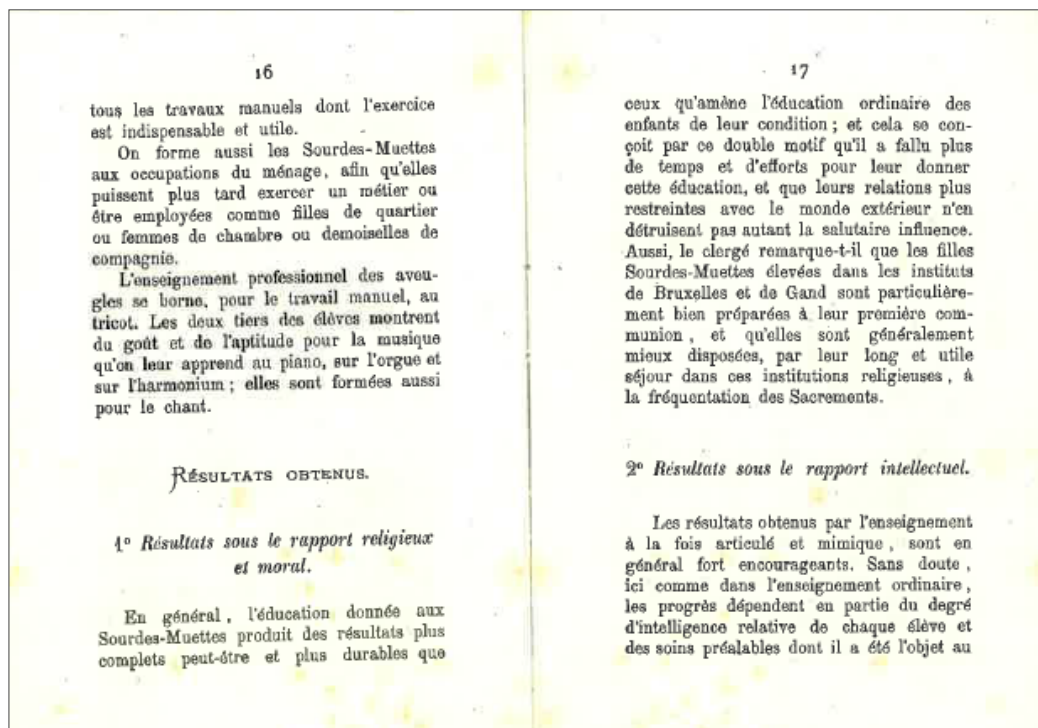
<sup>157</sup> Burch, S. (2002) *Signs of Resistance*, 21-3.

<sup>158</sup> Winzer M.A. (1993) *The History of Special Education*, 174.

<sup>159</sup> De Gérando, J.-M. (1827) *De l'éducation des sourds-muets de naissance*. Paris: Méquignon l'Ainé Père, 416.

their marriage certificates.<sup>160</sup> Literacy rates were slightly higher among their hearing siblings, but still about 40 percent were illiterate.<sup>161</sup> Having no language in common, neither sign nor written language, communication between the deaf and the other members of their households probably remained rudimentary, even after education.

**Figure 3.3** Report about the deaf schools of the Sisters of Charity in 1878.



Source: Beelaert, B., Bruyneel, C. & Leeman, K. (2009) *Vive la parole?*, 38.

A third element of deaf education was the focus on the acquisition of a profession. A prominent theme in nineteenth-century literature on deaf education is the responsibility of deaf schools to “leur [des élèves] apprend une profession manuelle, qui les classe parmi les membres actifs et utiles de la société” (teach them [the pupils] a manual profession, which turns them into active and useful members of society).<sup>162</sup> The belief that depending on charity should be avoided at all costs persuaded institutions that teaching a trade was the only way to break the cycle of poverty. Learning a profession was considered “als zijnde dit het eenige middel om hun niet voor altijd ten laste van de armen kassen te doen verblijven, maar hun in tegendeel in staat stellen van zelf in de kosten van hun levensonderhoud te voorzien” (the only way to prevent them from always being dependent on poor relief, and to

<sup>160</sup> One father and 23 mothers had an unknown level of literacy. They are excluded from the calculations.

<sup>161</sup> The 132 educated deaf had 163 hearing siblings in the control cohort. The level of literacy is known for 92 of the siblings. 55 of the 92 siblings were literate (= 60 percent).

<sup>162</sup> Menière, P. (1853) *De la guérison de la surdituté et de l'éducation des sourds-muets*. Paris: Germer Baillière, 53.



enable them to provide for the costs of their own maintenance).<sup>163</sup> Moreover, vocational training was also considered “*a moral exercise useful by itself*” as it accustomed pupils to work, instil in them a work ethic and was part of their physical education.<sup>164</sup> Deaf schools aimed to provide a professional education that would ease the transition from the institution to adult life, where they would be able to support themselves. The vocational training was geared to the supposed abilities of deaf people and in line with expectations for their adult lives. The girls had more practical lessons, including sewing by hand and with a machine, embroidering and housekeeping. According to Susan Plann, the principle objective of the education for girls was to prepare them to be wives and mothers, and to teach them how to run a household, as it was generally accepted that a woman’s purpose in life was to marry and raise a family.<sup>165</sup> The curriculum in the school for deaf girls in Ghent was shaped by the same ideology. The expectation was that deaf girls, like their hearing counterparts, would become wives and mothers, and the emphasis was on homemaking. Ilona Ghijssels, a graduate of the *Institut Royal des Sourdes-Muettes* in Ghent, confirms how they were taught to sew and “everything else they needed to know to run a good household”.<sup>166</sup> The most commonly taught professions for deaf boys were shoemaking and tailoring. These occupations were supposedly easy for deaf boys to learn and enabled them to be self-employed after graduation. In addition, in the surrounding countryside, deaf boys could become skilled gardeners or farmers, or they could choose training as a carpenter in the school’s workshop.<sup>167</sup> Although deaf schools actively trained pupils for future employment, Iain Hutchison says they also limited the pupils’ possibilities by upholding stereotypes of what deaf people could do through the very specific training provision.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Ghent, Archive Sisters of Charity, folder 3 “De Doofstommeninstelling”, letter from the provincial executive of East Flanders addressed to the municipal governments, dated December 31, 1825. In the letter, the municipalities were called on to send deaf-mute children to the institutions of the Sisters and Brothers of Charity. The letter emphasizes the importance of a proper education for deaf children.

<sup>164</sup> De Gérando, J.-M. (1827) *De l’éducation des sourds muets de naissance*, 160.

<sup>165</sup> Plann, S. (2007) “Deaf Lives: Nineteenth-Century Spanish Deaf Girls and Women” *Sign Language Studies*, 7/2, 173-4. See also: Lee, J. (2006) “Family Matters: Female Dynamics within Deaf Schools” In: Brueggemann, B.J. & Burch, S. (eds.) *Women and Deafness: Double Visions*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 5-20.

<sup>166</sup> Buyens, M. (2005) *De dove persoon, zijn gebarentaal en het dovenonderwijs*, 97.

<sup>167</sup> Brother Swithinus (1950) *De zorg voor doofstommen door het Gentse Instituut van 1825 af tot op heden*. Ledeberg: Archive Deaf Centre Emmaüs; Buyens, M. (2005) *De dove persoon, zijn gebarentaal en het dovenonderwijs*, 97. The relationship between education and employment in adult life is examined in more detail in Chapter 4 (section 4.4).

<sup>168</sup> Hutchison, I. (2007) *A History of Disability in Nineteenth-Century Scotland*, 274.

**Figure 3.4** Dormitory *Institut des Sourdes-Muettes* in Ghent, 1903



Source: Beelaert, B., Bruyneel, C. & Leeman, K. (2009) *Vive la parole?*, 70.

The education was organized within a boarding school system. Thus, the pupils lived in the deaf institution and only went home at certain times of the year. Testimonies by pupils who graduated from a Flemish deaf school in the first half of the twentieth century indicate that they went home about three times a year, around Christmas (8 days), Easter (12 days) and during summer (1.5 months).<sup>169</sup> In a letter to the general school inspector, dated February 23, 1881, the *Institut Royal des Sourdes-Muettes* in Ghent recommended the boarding of pupils for three reasons. First, for physical reasons: as the deaf originated mainly from the destitute classes, lived in miserable physical conditions, had a weak constitution and were “*lymphatiques*”, they were in need of nourishing food. Following a good regimen would result, after several years, in a better constitution. Second, from a moral perspective: as the deaf were mostly left to fend for themselves, due to the lack of supervision from their parents, they were exposed to many more physical dangers, but even worse, to a greater “*pervertissement et de corruption morale*” (perversion and moral corruption). And thirdly, from an intellectual point of view, the school management argued that deaf children could only receive education for a couple of hours a day. However, in a boarding school, the teachers could take advantage of the educational possibilities throughout the day. Moreover, mutual contact was believed to enhance their intellectual development as it stimulated competition and they could educate each other.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Buyens, M. (2005) *De dove persoon, zijn gebarentaal en het dovenonderwijs*, 257.

<sup>170</sup> Ghent, Archive Sisters of Charity, folder 3 “De Doofstommeninstelling”, letter from the school management to the general school inspector, dated February 23, 1881.

### 3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I attempted to shed some light on the lives of deaf children and their parents. The lack of quantitative and qualitative source materials regarding the childhood experiences of the research population means that many questions have been left unanswered.

With regard to household composition, I showed that most deaf children spent their childhoods in nuclear families, consisting of parents and on average six to seven siblings. However, many deaf children lost one or more siblings during childhood and 31 percent of all deaf children lost at least one parent before their sixteenth birthday. I put forward the assumption that this loss may have triggered a period of economic hardship, compelling the children to enter the labour market prematurely. However, I found no evidence of child labour among the deaf children. Whether this is the result of an incomplete registration in the sources, the informal character of the labour performed or an actual lower level of employment – due to, for example, the inability to find employment or higher school attendance in the nineteenth century – is difficult to say. 23 percent of all deaf children in the dataset lived in a family with more than one deaf person, almost always another sibling(s). Starting from this observation, together with the finding that deaf children were born in all socio-economic groups more or less equally, I suggested that most deaf children in the dataset were probably congenitally deaf. In a period with limited medical knowledge, it is less of a surprise that contemporaries identified various plausible and more improbable sources of deafness – a pregnant woman experiencing a fright being one of the most peculiar.

However, the demographic characteristics of the parental households did fail to offer insight into the personal relationships between parents and their children. The questions of how parents reacted when they discovered their child was deaf, and how a household with a deaf child functioned on a daily basis, could only be answered superficially. Undoubtedly, the inability to hear and speak hindered the communication possibilities between deaf children and the people around them. However, families developed systems of ‘home signs’, which allowed rudimentary conversations. Therefore, deaf children may not have been entirely ‘cut off’ from their families. Equally, it seems very unlikely that the inability of deaf children to hear their parents implied that they were all unaware their families loved them, as some sources suggested. In an attempt to grasp the attitudes of parents of deaf children, I highlighted some contemporary attitudes towards deafness, based on late eighteenth and nineteenth century writings. Many of the publications express similar views on deafness: deaf people were considered to be like animals without access to reason, morals, social relationships and happiness. The question can be raised as to what extent these views were shared by the public, hearing parents of deaf children in particular, or were merely propagated to serve a specific

goal. Physicians and quacks alike could use the negative stereotyping to attract patients and customers for various ‘cures’ for deafness, while educationalists saw in them a means to promote the attendance of deaf schools.

Deaf schools, in particular, were considered the solution for returning deaf children to society. To this end, the school curricula were designed to improve their communication possibilities with the hearing, as well as to provide them with the means to fend for themselves in adulthood. Education was the way to bring deaf children from darkness to light, to free them from their sadness and solitude. However, herein lies the contradictory nature of the educational process. Although schools aimed to help deaf children to overcome the difficulties of fitting in and to prevent individual discrimination, the effect was often the opposite. By secluding the deaf children in separate institutions, they now experienced a “*shared discrimination*”, “*being discriminated against as a category of humanity, as deaf and disabled*”.<sup>171</sup>

After looking into the childhoods of the deaf individuals, I now turn to an evaluation of the most characteristic aspects of adulthood, such as the search for employment, for a partner and setting up a household. The line between childhood and adulthood is not an easy one to draw. Does the end of childhood coincide with leaving the parental household? With entering the labour market or with marriage? The distinction is even more arguable with regard to deaf people. Perceived as fundamentally inferior and helpless, especially if they had no education, they attained the status of being eternal children: morally underdeveloped, lesser people, faced with a life of dependence.<sup>172</sup> In penal legislation, they were even treated as minors their whole lives (see 7.2.5). Nonetheless, practical considerations mean the subsequent analyses start when deaf people reached the age of 15, the age at which the general population was assumed to enter the labour and marriage market.

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<sup>171</sup> Branson J. & Miller D. (2002) *Damned for Their Difference*, 139.

<sup>172</sup> E.g. Joyner, H. (2004) *From Pity to Pride*, 35; Bauman, H.-D.L. (2008) *Open Your Eyes: Deaf Studies Talking*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 314; Scott, R.W. (1870) *The Deaf and Dumb: Their Education and Social Position*, 7.



# Adulthood

*“O neen! Gij, hoorenden, gij kunt niet begrijpen wat het is doof en stom te zijn, zoo gij de slagen dezer wreede natuurramp op geen enkel lid uwer familie hebt voelen wegen. Gij blijft onverschillig voor het lot van dit wezen, omdat zijn ongeluk u geen belang inboezemt, omdat hij het niet kent, omdat hij het niet begrijpt.” (Cappron, 1862)*

(O no! You, hearing people, cannot understand what it means to be deaf and dumb, if you did not witness the misfortune of this cruel natural disaster on a member of your own family. You are indifferent to the fate of this creature, because his unhappiness does not concern you, because he does not know it, because he does not understand it)



## 4 Labour and employment

### 4.1 Introduction

“The quiet, peaceful labour suits the deaf-mutes most of all”<sup>1</sup>

Few aspects of the lives of people with a disability have received as much attention as the relationship between disability and employment. In today’s society, as sociologist R. L. O’Brien puts it: “*disability as a status, both in practice and in the official definitions constructed in social policy, is derived in relation to one’s ability to participate in work*”.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the relationship between an individual’s impairment and the degree to which that individual is deemed incapable of earning a living is considered the most important indicator of disability. A disabled body is perceived essentially through its incapacity to perform.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, studies into employment opportunities for disabled men and women are manifold. A 1996 survey of the primary sources of income among populations within the European Union indicated that persons without a disability are more likely to earn their own income than those with a moderate or a severe disability. It found that 51 percent of people with a moderate disability and 74 percent of those with a severe disability had no direct income. Over a decade later, little has changed. The 2010 report of the international OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) emphasizes that the disabled have low employment rates despite current efforts to improve them.<sup>4</sup> More recently, political scientist L. Schur, economist D. Kruse

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<sup>1</sup> Van Meurs, C. (1916) *De doofstomme in de maatschappij*. Schiedam: Roelants.

<sup>2</sup> O’Brien, R.L. (2013) “Economy and Disability: Labor Market Conditions and the Disability of Working-Age Individuals” *Social Problems*, 60/3, 321.

<sup>3</sup> Metzler, I. (2006) *Disability in Medieval Europe. Thinking About Physical Impairment During the High Middle Ages, c. 1100-1400*. London: Routledge, 7.

<sup>4</sup> OECD (2010) *Sickness, Disability and Work: Breaking the Barriers: A Synthesis of Findings across OECD Countries*. OECD Publishing.



and psychologist P. Blanck showed that disabled people have more difficulties in finding and maintaining employment, have lower than average incomes and are thus more likely to live in poverty.<sup>5</sup> Several studies confirmed that deaf workers experience similar disadvantages.<sup>6</sup> It has been suggested that the roots of this inequality can be traced back to nineteenth-century industrialization processes. Yet few disability scholars have endeavoured to study the employment opportunities for disabled men and women in the past.

In the field of history, the development of an industrial society and the history of labour have received ample attention. But while scholarly interest, from the middle of the twentieth century onwards, in the impact of modernization on everyday people has positioned 'ordinary' men, women and children at the heart of the debate, not all sections of society have received equal attention.<sup>7</sup> In part, this has been the result of problems in finding adequate source materials. With few avenues for tracing disabled individuals in the record trail, historians have largely refrained from inquiring into the industrialization process's impact in this area.

Historical materialist accounts have argued that before industrialization people with disabilities were assimilated easily into the workforce. However, with the development of an industrial society they were forced out the labour market. In his *Geographies of Disability*, Brendan Gleeson compared the working experiences of physically disabled peasants in feudal England with those of disabled individuals living in the nineteenth-century industrial city of Melbourne. He concludes that while physically impaired persons were perfectly able to sustain themselves through a combination of their own productive endeavours and survival strategies in the pre-industrial society, within the industrial society their ability to make meaningful contributions to their families and households weakened.<sup>8</sup> However, Gleeson's conclusions for the feudal period are based on two sample sizes of respectively only 47 and 20 physically impaired persons living in

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<sup>5</sup> Schur, L., Kruse, D. & Blanck, P. (2013) *People with Disabilities: Sidelined or Mainstreamed?* New York: Cambridge University Press. For more on the disadvantages of disabled workers in the present-day labour market: Berkowitz, M. & Hill, A.M. (1986) *Disability and the Labor Market: Economic Problems, Policies and Programs*. Ithaca: ILR Press; Weaver, C. (1991) *Disability and Work: Incentives, Rights and Opportunities*. Washington: ACI Press.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Barnartt, S. (1986) *Disability as a Socioeconomic Variable: Predicting Deaf Worker's Incomes*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the ASA (American Sociological Association); Christiansen, J.B. & Barnartt, S.N. (1987) "The Silent Minority: The Socio-Economic Status of Deaf People" In: Higgins, P. & Nash, J. (eds.) *Understanding Deafness Socially*. Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 171-96.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Goloboy, J.L. (ed.) (2008) *Industrial Revolution: People and Perspectives*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO; Humphries, J. (2010) *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Burnett, J. (2011) *Gender, Work and Wages in Industrial Revolution Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>8</sup> Gleeson, B. (1999) *Geographies of Disability*. London: Routledge, 96-100.

sixteenth-century Norwich and seventeenth-century Salisbury. Moreover, his argument for a nineteenth-century deterioration is founded on three hardly convincing observations. First, he states that many disabled individuals ended up in an institution by showing that 597 of the Melbourne Benevolent Asylum residents (1860-1880) were disabled. However, the total population of inmates is unknown, as well as the number of impaired persons living outside the institution. Secondly, he posits that many disabled individuals were dependent on charity by showing that 1,004 disabled individuals received outdoor relief from the Melbourne Ladies' Benevolent Society in the period 1849-1900. But again no indication is given of the total number of people with disabilities living in Melbourne in that period. Moreover, Gleeson mentions that about 150,000 able-bodied persons also received support in the same period. Finally, he argues that disabled persons were left to the streets for earning a meagre living, based on the occupations of only 36 male impaired persons.

Other scholars claim that people with disabilities were always 'problematical' as they could not perform their social responsibilities satisfactorily and were dependent on the productive non-disabled.<sup>9</sup> Hahn even states that disabled people in pre-modern England were doomed to become either beggars or minstrels "*who wandered around the countryside, until they became the first group to receive outdoor relief under the English poor law of 1601 and subsequent legislation*".<sup>10</sup> Similarly, other scholars have pointed out the difficulties of people with disabilities on the labour market. In her study on disability and social policy in Britain since 1750, Anne Borsay argues that social inclusion of the disabled was dependent on effective participation in the labour market, and that this was hindered by discrimination and a lack of educational opportunities. Borsay circumscribes the disabled as "*marginal employees, vulnerable to low wages, to unemployment, and hence to poverty*".<sup>11</sup> Emily Cockayne agrees, stating that people born deaf in the Early Modern Period were destined to become manual labourers.<sup>12</sup> Others such as Colin Barnes, Geof Mercer and Tom Shakespeare, describe the work available to the disabled in the past as "*poorly paid, low-skilled jobs, which are both less rewarding and demanding*".<sup>13</sup> According to David Turner, an impairment did not prevent a person from undertaking any kind of economic labour, but the kind of work offered was usually "*low-paid, casual and menial*". Impairment thus entailed a shift from skilled to unskilled work, the transition from regular

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<sup>9</sup> E.g. Safilios-Rothschild, C. (1970) *The Sociology and Social Psychology of Disability and Rehabilitation*. New York: Random House.

<sup>10</sup> Hahn, H. (1988) "Can Disability Be Beautiful?" *Social Policy*, 29.

<sup>11</sup> Borsay, A. (2005) *Disability and Social Policy in Britain since 1750*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 139.

<sup>12</sup> Cockayne, E. (2003) "Experiences of the Deaf in Early Modern England" *The Historical Journal*, 46/3, 505.

<sup>13</sup> Barnes, C., Mercer, G. & Shakespeare, T. (1999) *Exploring Disability. A Sociological Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 111.

to insecure, casual or unsettled employment.<sup>14</sup> However, few of these statements have been underpinned by historical research and little is known about the work experiences of people with impairments in the past. Nonetheless, gaining insight into deaf men and women's access to the labour market and their perspectives on the labour market is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of deaf people in the past. The ability to work and exclusion from certain economic activities largely determined the ways in which deaf people were able to live an independent life and how they were defined by others and themselves. A mid-nineteenth century quote by surgeon-aurist James Yearsly illustrates this perfectly<sup>15</sup>:

*“When deprived of a sense of hearing, they become disqualified to pursue their ordinary occupations and are, not infrequently, reduced to a state of destitution; they are cast upon the world without the opportunity of earning a livelihood, as well as depressed by the nature of the disease, and by the gloom it throws over the mind.”*

Psychological and sociological research has confirmed how work is closely linked to individual identity, feelings about social status and a person's well-being.<sup>16</sup> Turner, in his study into people with disabilities in eighteenth-century England, emphasized the important role of occupation in the establishment of a man's identity and place in society – much more than for women. As a result, a change in occupation or the inability to work due to an impairment could cause despair or even push a person into criminality.<sup>17</sup> Iain Hutchison too states that employment was a central component in nineteenth-century ideals of respectability and being “*morally upright and financially independent*”. In order to achieve these ideals, many disabled people would have taken on virtually any employment in order to maintain a degree of personal control over their lives.<sup>18</sup>

Issues of labour and employment are thus permeated with different attitudes to work and workers. A key element is the way in which work is defined. In the modern world, work is defined as “*paid services yielding monetary means of exchange on a labour market*”.<sup>19</sup> The relevance of this restrictive definition for past economies, however, has been questioned. Starting from this limited definition, activities that were performed but not paid

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<sup>14</sup> Turner, D.M. (2012) *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England: Imagining Physical Impairment*. New York: Routledge, 128-9.

<sup>15</sup> Yearsly J. (1847) *Deafness Practically Illustrated: Being an Exposition of Original Views as to the Causes and Treatment of Diseases of the Ear*. London: John Churchill, 1.

<sup>16</sup> E.g. Haworth, J.T. (1997) *Work, Leisure and Well-Being*. London: Routledge; Dewe, P. & Cooper, C. (2012) *Well-Being and Work. Towards a Balanced Agenda*. Houndmills: Pgrave Macmillan.

<sup>17</sup> Turner, D.M. (2012) *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England*, 128-9.

<sup>18</sup> Hutchison, I. (2007) *A History of Disability in Nineteenth-Century Scotland*. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 241-2.

<sup>19</sup> Lis, C. & Soly, H. (2012) *Worthy Efforts: Attitudes to Work and Workers in Pre-Industrial Europe*. Leiden: Brill, 1.

for are not recognized as work. Nonetheless, in line with the general absence of wage labour, there was no real distinction between paid and unpaid labour in the early modern household economy.<sup>20</sup> The domestic sphere was also the workplace and work was often compensated for by goods and reciprocal services. Until the nineteenth century, most households were more or less self-sufficient, producing the goods and services they needed to live themselves. These goods and services could be exchanged with relatives, friends and neighbours.<sup>21</sup> The implications of a restricted approach to work are particularly problematic for women's work. As women performed essentially unpaid work, such as household chores, caring for children and assisting their husbands with farm work or other activities, they are mainly considered to be out of work.

In the course of the nineteenth century, parallel to the development of patriarchal capitalist work relations, distinct social spaces for labour and non-labour (or unpaid labour) were created. New industrial workplaces were reserved for the former, while the home was associated with the latter.<sup>22</sup> Thus, whereas people engaged in unpaid domestic production were considered 'at work' in the eighteenth century, they were no longer in the nineteenth century. Simultaneously, paid labour became increasingly associated with ideals of respectability and moral uprightness. Being unemployed (or at least not engaged in paid work) was to fail to meet this prevailing ethos of self-sufficiency and independence.<sup>23</sup> To understand work in all its aspects, labour historians therefore stress the need to look beyond the economic realm and consider the social and political meanings of work.<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, people's own attitudes towards work and the general work ethic in past societies are indispensable to the study of employment.<sup>25</sup> More specific considerations relate to attitudes that existed towards the work efforts of disabled people and of deaf people specifically. The topic of employment revives the debate about the relationship between deaf individuals and people with other disabilities. Indeed, it can be assumed that deafness was less of a hindrance for a wide range of occupations than for example blindness or intellectual and physical limitations. An advertisement in the Brussels Catholic newspaper *Le XXe siècle* of June 6, 1898, indeed suggests that a lack of hearing and speech was not always considered a stumbling block for employers. In the advertisement a business firm offers a job in bookkeeping "*préférer. donnée à sourd-muet*" (preferably to a deaf-mute),

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<sup>20</sup> Gleeson, B. (1999) *Geographies of Disability*, 80.

<sup>21</sup> Van Hoof, J. & Van Ruyseveldt, J. (eds.) (2006) *Arbeid in verandering*. Kluwer: Deventer, 13-43.

<sup>22</sup> Gleeson, B. (1999) *Geographies of Disability*, 106.

<sup>23</sup> Hutchison, I. *A History of Disability in Nineteenth-Century Scotland*, 286.

<sup>24</sup> Joyce, P. (ed.) (1987) *The Historical Meanings of Work*. Cambridge: Cambridge university press, 3.

<sup>25</sup> E.g. Lis, C. & Soly, H. (2012) *Worthy Efforts*.

provided he has a “*belle écriture*” (beautiful handwriting).<sup>26</sup> Present-day readers are left guessing as to the employer’s motive for recruiting a deaf employee. Considering the type of occupation, a deaf-mute person was perhaps believed to be more discreet. The capacity for the disabled to work was determined not just by the nature of a person’s impairments, but also by the structure and diversity of the local economy and the social context. Turner assumes that employment opportunities for disabled people in eighteenth-century England were fewer in areas dominated by rural labour or types of industry such as mining, where physical strength was required, compared to urban economies where there was a variety of casual employment available.<sup>27</sup> Hutchison indicates that in some communities, people with disabilities were provided with work, sometimes no more than token tasks, to keep them from poor relief. However, other sources indicate that people with disabilities were perceived as individuals who could not and should not undertake employment. Negative attitudes towards the capacity of disabled individuals to work may even have inhibited individuals from taking on occupations that they considered themselves quite capable of performing.<sup>28</sup>

Assessing the beliefs and attitudes that existed to employment of deaf people is an almost impossible task as sources remain largely silent on the topic. Previous research has focused on attitudes to certain social groups, such as men and women separately or the different categories of poor people and their (in)ability to work.<sup>29</sup> Undoubtedly deaf men and women could be found among all these groups. However, they have received hardly any special mention. As a result, this chapter has to approach employment from a predominantly economic perspective based on formal occupation registrations. Nevertheless, throughout the chapter attempts are made to embed the research results in a broader cultural and ideological context. The development of deaf schools in the nineteenth century, characterized by a strong belief in the importance of vocational training for deaf boys and girls, and the seemingly contradictory classification of the deaf among the ‘deserving’ poor in nineteenth-century poverty relief, illustrate the different opinions about the position of deaf persons on the labour market, and will also be discussed.

I start this chapter with a brief discussion of the source material and its limitations for doing historical research into employment (4.2). As the general labour characteristics of East Flanders were discussed in Chapter 2, section 4.3 immediately presents the results

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<sup>26</sup> “Comptabilité” in *Le XXe Siècle*, June 6, 1898.

<sup>27</sup> Turner, D.M. (2012) *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England*, 128-9.

<sup>28</sup> Hutchison, I. (2007) *A History of Disability in Nineteenth-Century Scotland*, 258.

<sup>29</sup> E.g. Lis, C. & Soly, H. (2012) *Worthy Efforts*; Tilly, L., & Scott, J. (1978) *Women, Work and Family*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston; Lis, C. (1986) *Social Change and the Labouring Poor. Antwerp, 1770-1860*. London: Yale University Press.

of the employment analyses of the research cohorts. The employment opportunities for deaf men and women are analysed in the examination of unemployment (4.3.2) and the characteristics of the working population (4.3.3). The relationship between the development of deaf schools and the employment opportunities of the students is analysed in 4.4. The chapter concludes with an examination of the experience of poverty in the research cohorts (4.5). The scarce data available on the status of wealth of the research individuals is embedded in a broader context of poverty legislation and the right of disabled people, as part of the deserving poor, to support.

## 4.2 The study of employment: sources and their limitations

Any inquiry into employment in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries faces several difficulties, mainly due to the nature of the source material. In Belgium, different historical sources can be used to retrieve occupational information: birth, marriage and death certificates (from 1796), population registers (from 1846), population censuses and alternative sources such as probate inventories, court records, business and trade directories and local population listings.<sup>30</sup> In this life course analysis, occupations from civil and population registers were accumulated in the *employment* subfile of the *research individual file* of each individual (see 2.2.1). Attempts to retrieve additional occupations of the research individuals in other sources were dropped because of the small chances of matching identical individuals. However, for some deaf persons additional occupational information was found in the sources used for identifying them. Conscription registers and individual bulletins always mentioned the occupation of a person at the time of registration. The *Staat van alle de stomme-dooven welke zig bevinden in de provincie Oost-Vlaanderen* occasionally mentioned a person's occupation.

If a research subject married and became a parent, marriage and birth certificates provide occupational information. Marriage certificates are particularly valuable in the study of employment as they mention the occupation of both marriage partners and of both their parents, as well as information on the literacy of both marriage partners and thus their level of education - which potentially influenced their employment opportunities. Birth registers contain information about the occupation of the father, as he came to declare the birth of a child at the town council. Only in the case of an illegiti-

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<sup>30</sup> For examples, see: Devos, I., De Langhe, S. & Matthys, C. (2014) "Lost in Registration? Missing Occupations of Single Women in the Bruges Countryside, c.1814" *The History of the Family*, 19/4.

mate birth, when the mother reported the birth, is there an indication of the mother's occupation. As a mere 10 percent of the deaf research population married and started a family, marriage and birth certificates provided occupational data for only a small number of deaf individuals. Available for almost all the research subjects were death certificates. Death certificates mention the occupation of the deceased at the time of death. The downside is the over-representation of people without occupation as the majority were retired at the time of death – though presumably they had been active previously on the labour market. For the second research cohort, job listings on a more regular basis were found in population registers. Population registers theoretically record the occupation of every adult person in a household. However, in practice town clerks often only recorded the occupation of the household head. Moreover, if a person changed occupation during the ten-year period before the next registration, no amendments were made to the registers.

In addition, both the civil and population registers are characterized by an under-registration of female employment. Historians Devos, De Langhe and Matthys have illustrated the flaws of population registers in the registration of employment, in particular of female employment. This under-registration is partly the result of the marriage-centred perspective of local government officials, leading them to focus their registration efforts entirely on the head of the household. It is also the product of the characteristics of female employment, which was often part-time, seasonal or irregular, and perceived as merely a way to supplement the husband's income.<sup>31</sup>

**Table 4.1** Events without a registered occupation, in %

	Birth cohort 1		Birth cohort 2	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Deaf cohort	27.9	44.4	51.4	70.2
Sibling cohort	22	45.1	44.9	58.9

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Table 4.1 represents the percentages of life events at which no occupation was registered in the sources in relation to the total number of life events in the dataset. For both the men and the women, the event of the death of a child was excluded, as the registration of the occupation of the parents was not common if the child had come of age. For the women, the event of the birth of a child was excluded as well, as most often only the occupation of the father was recorded (as he was the one to declare the birth). The other life events at which an occupation could be recorded were marriage, death or at the registration of residence/migration.

<sup>31</sup> Devos, I., De Langhe, S. & Matthys, C. (2014) "Lost in Registration?".

Table 4.1 illustrates the large under-registration of female employment. Between 44 and 70 percent of the sources mentioned no occupation for the women. Similarly, the occupations of the deaf research population were registered less frequently, and even less often in the second birth cohort. This may indicate the informal character of deaf employment. The lack of registered occupations for the deaf and female research population made their employment career the most difficult to reconstruct. By combining different sources (triangulation), the career paths of the research population were reconstructed as much as possible.

The lack of occupational registration before 1796, the absence of continuous occupational information and the under-registration of female employment were not the only difficulties that needed to be taken into account. Problems also arose in relation to the interpretation of the recorded occupations. The first difficulty was the issue of double occupations, characteristic of many early modern economies. The occupation of the person could depend on the season. For example, in wintertime people were more likely to be registered as a textile manufacturer, while in summertime a larger proportion of the active population worked as self-supporting farmers or as paid day labourers in agriculture. So certificates made in different seasons may have indicated different occupations for the same person. Although a person could have changed occupation in the intervening period, it is more likely that a person combined different occupations. Depending on the frequency with which job descriptions are available for a person, this versatile occupational profile becomes apparent. Furthermore, it is difficult to assess the content of some occupations. For example, it is not clear whether a farmer worked his own land as the owner, rented a piece of land or worked someone else's field. In other occupations too the distinction between employer and employee is not easily made. Jaspers and Stevens, in their research into employment in eighteenth-century Flanders, also noticed that people were aware of the social status of some occupations, which led them to lie about their real occupation. As a result, textile manufacturing and unskilled labour – seen as having a low status – were under-registered, while agriculture – which could imply ownership of land – had a high ranking.<sup>32</sup> These observations need to be kept in mind when discussing the characteristics of deaf employment.

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<sup>32</sup> Jaspers, L. & Stevens, C. (1985) *Arbeid en tewerkstelling in Oost-Vlaanderen op het einde van het Ancien Regime. Een socio-professionele en demografische analyse*. Ghent: Provinciebestuur Oost-Vlaanderen, 91-2.



## 4.3 Employment characteristics of the deaf

### 4.3.1 Research population and variables of interest

This section aims to empirically test the widely held assumption that nineteenth-century transformations resulted in a deterioration of the employment opportunities for the disabled. The focus in the analysis is on the differences in employment between individuals with and without an auditory disability, and on the evolution of employment characteristics in the nineteenth century. The employment pattern of the deaf born between 1748 and 1810 (pre-industrial birth cohort) is expected to be in line with the employment characteristics of the siblings of the same birth cohort. The findings in the industrial birth cohort (born between 1830 and 1860) should point to a growing discrepancy between the deaf and the hearing, with a general deterioration in employment opportunities for the deaf.

**Table 4.2** Deaf individuals with at least one recorded occupation, in N

	Birth cohort 1: 1748-1810				Birth cohort 2: 1830-1860			
	Urban		Rural		Urban		Rural	
	All	15-65	All	15-65	All	15-65	All	15-65
Men	17	17	65	61	29	24	41	41
Women	7	7	44	37	19	16	37	35
<i>Total</i>	24	24	109	98	48	40	78	76

Source: MS Acces database, research individual file

**Table 4.3** Siblings with at least one recorded occupation, in N

	Birth cohort 1: 1748-1810				Birth cohort 2: 1830-1860			
	Urban		Rural		Urban		Rural	
	All	15-65	All	15-65	All	15-65	All	15-65
Men	16	15	59	55	26	26	44	44
Women	9	9	48	45	21	19	44	43
<i>Total</i>	25	24	107	100	47	45	88	87

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

These assumptions are tested on a research group of 259 deaf and 267 hearing siblings for whom historical sources provided one or more occupations. Individuals explicitly

recorded “without occupation” are not excluded, but classified in a separate category.<sup>33</sup> Tables 4.2 and 4.3 illustrate the number of research individuals in the analyses according to birth cohort, environment and gender. For each category the table provides two numbers: one indicating all individuals (All) and one indicating the individuals with an occupation recorded between the ages of 15 and 65, which are considered the economically active years.

The number of recorded occupations varies between the research individuals. Individuals who married and became a parent left more sources – a marriage certificate and the birth and death certificates of their children. Deaf men and women, as I will show in Chapter 5, were less likely to marry and become a parent than their hearing siblings. As such, they experienced fewer *events* at which an occupation could be recorded. For the 259 deaf men and women I aggregated 913 occupations, while in the sibling cohort the number amounts to 1406 occupations.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, due to the increased availability of occupational listings in population registers, more occupations are recorded for individuals born in the second birth cohort: respectively 1007 recordings in the first birth cohort (424 deaf and 583 siblings) and 1312 in the second (489 deaf and 823 siblings). These differences between the deaf and hearing, as well as between the first and second birth cohort, call for a cautious interpretation of the research results. Because of a lower representation of occupations in the sources it is not unlikely that the reconstructed career paths of the deaf and first birth cohorts are incomplete. Likewise, due to the uneven registration it is difficult to implement event history analysis techniques. Nevertheless, the use of cross-tabulations also enables to reveal important developments.

A person’s employment opportunities were undoubtedly influenced by characteristics other than the presence or absence of an impairment. There was also an interaction between variables such as sex, marital status, age, environment, residential situation and social class, which would have shaped the occupational destinies of people. As such, these variables need to be taken into account in the analysis. It is assumed that women were more likely to be registered as unemployed, especially if they were married.<sup>35</sup> Ac-

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<sup>33</sup> When no occupation is mentioned in the source, it is not always clear whether the individual is unemployed or whether the occupation is just not registered. For that reason, only individuals explicitly recorded “without occupation” are taken into account. This consideration resulted in the exclusion of 25 of the deaf and 17 of the hearing siblings in the analysis, as there was no occupation recorded for them and it was not mentioned that they were “without occupation” (hence 259 of the 284 deaf and 267 of the 284 hearing research subjects).

<sup>34</sup> The 913 and 1406 occupations are not unique occupations, but occupations recorded at a unique point in time. Thus, for example, a person can be recorded as a farmer at three points in his their (marriage certificate, birth certificate of a child and death certificate). These three records are all counted. In 3.3.3, however, computations are based on unique occupations.

<sup>35</sup> See 3.2: the marital status was often considered more noteworthy than their occupation.

ording to sociologist Sharon Barnartt deaf women were disadvantaged twice on the labour market: because they were deaf, but even more because of their gender.<sup>36</sup> The same applies to the elderly, who were more likely to be unemployed because of old age. With regard to environment, it has been suggested that it was easier to employ the deaf living in rural regions, as agriculture required fewer skills than certain types of crafts (more typical of the cities). The size of the community may also have influenced the sense of isolation (lower in a close-knit country village) and the opportunities to contact a varied range of employers and to develop literacy skills (more in larger cities).<sup>37</sup> Sex, marital status, age and environment can easily be deduced from the *research individual files* in the database.

Determining a person's residential situation and social class required somewhat more effort. The reconstruction of a person's residential situation is subject to differences across the research population. For individuals recorded in population registers, there is access to continuous and detailed information about the type of household and the composition of their household. If no population registers are available, information is scarcer. Civil birth, marriage and death certificates usually give a person's address and state whether it was their own house, the house of someone else or an institution. But they remain silent on the composition of the household. However, linking the certificates with the civil status and civil certificates of other family members provides some rudimentary indication of whether or not a person lived in a multiple household. In the analysis, I have defined four categories of residences: (1) a person was institutionalized at the time of registration; (2) a person was living in a household where he or she was not (married to) the head of the household. In most cases, individuals were living in with their parents or close relatives such as siblings; (3) a person lived independently at time of registration, meaning he or she was (married to) the head of a household. A further distinction was made between individuals living on their own, individuals living together with others and those with an unknown household composition<sup>38</sup>; (4) for some individuals the residential situation is unknown, which means it is uncertain whether a person was heading their own household or living in the household of others. However, it was possible to distinguish between those who lived in a multiple household and those with a completely unknown residential situation.

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<sup>36</sup> Barnartt, S. (2006) "Deaf Women and Inequality in Educational Attainment and Occupational Status: Is Deafness or Femaleness to Blame?" In: Brueggemann, B.J. & Burch, S. (eds.) *Women and Deafness: Double Visions*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 57-80.

<sup>37</sup> Cockayne, E. (2003) "Experiences of the Deaf in Early Modern England", 509.

<sup>38</sup> E.g. a death certificate could state that a person "died in his own home". We then know that he was not institutionalized or living in at the time of death. However, if no population registers are available, it is uncertain whether the person lived in a single or multiple household.

The impact of social class was most difficult to assess, as there is less data in this regard. In analogy with previous research and because of missing data problems, the delineation of socio-economic groups was kept simple and based on the highest rated occupation of the fathers of the research individuals. Occupational status has been defined as a “reliable and powerful characteristic of persons and households” because of its “substantial correlation with other social and economic variables”.<sup>39</sup> Since the introduction of occupational coding schemes such as HISCO and SOCPO, it has become possible to allocate comparable occupations to the same classes, and therefore to undertake social class comparisons.<sup>40</sup> Based on a modification of the SOCPO scheme, a distinction was made between research individuals born in a family with a father belonging to the group of (1) unskilled workers, (2) (semi-)skilled workers, and (3) middle class and elite workers.

I start with an analysis of the incidence of unemployment among the research individuals in 4.3.2. Subsequently I analyze the characteristics of the deaf men and women with an occupation in 4.3.3.

#### 4.3.2 Unemployment as an indication of economic discrimination

Louis Felix Remue was born deaf in Ghent in April 1832. In each population register, starting from 1847 until his death in 1909, Louis Felix was registered as *without occupation*. Based on the sources, Louis Felix appears to have been unemployed his whole life. How common was such an occupational career – or rather the lack of one – for deaf individuals in general? And does the lifelong unemployment of Louis Felix imply that he led a passive life? Crucial to answering the main research questions is the issue of unemployment and the differences herein between deaf and hearing individuals, as well as the evolution of these differences over time. A more vulnerable position of the deaf on the labour market may become apparent through a higher number of deaf individuals without occupation, and growing unemployment rates in the course of the nineteenth century.

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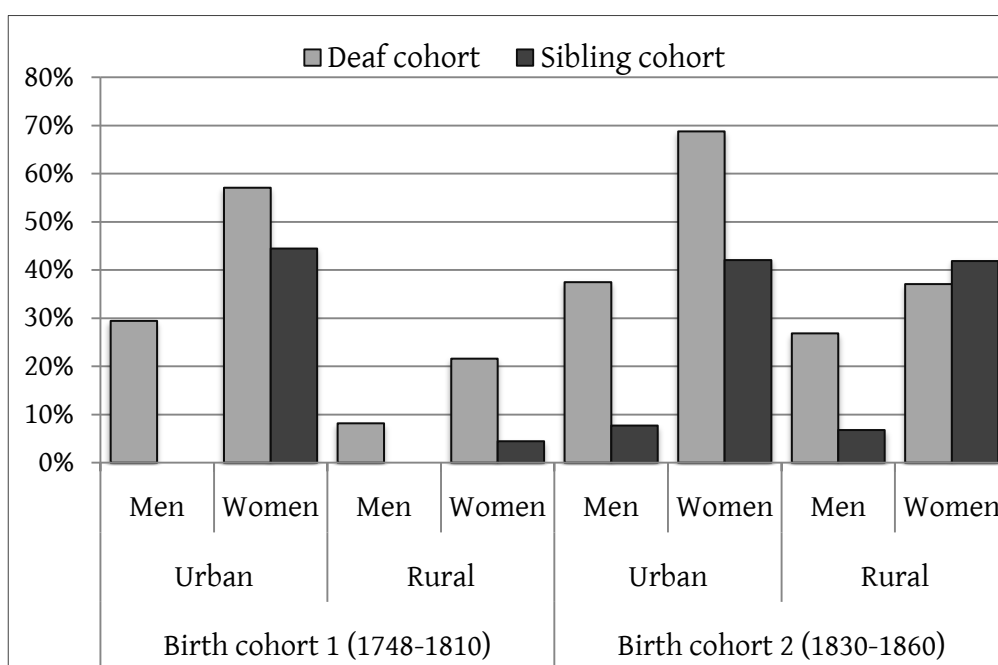
<sup>39</sup> Hauser, R.M. & Warren, J.R. (1996) *Socioeconomic Indexes for Occupations: A Review, Update and Critique*. Wiscconsin: University of Wiscconsin (Centre for Demography and Ecology: Working paper).

<sup>40</sup> Van Leeuwen, M. & Maas, I. (2005) “Endogamy and Social Class in History: An Overview” *International Review of Social History*, 50 (supplement), 1-23. For more on HISCO and SOCPO classification schemes: Van Leeuwen, M.H.D., Maas, I. & Miles, A. (2002) *HISCO - Historical International Standard Classification of Occupations*. Leuven; Van De Putte, B. & Miles, A. (2005) “A Social Classification Scheme for Historical Occupational Data. Partner Selection and Industrialism in Belgium and England, 1800-1918” *Historical Methods*, 38/2, 61-92.

### 4.3.2.1 Unemployment in numbers: frequencies and means

Figure 4.1 presents the number of deaf and hearing individuals explicitly recorded “without occupation” according to environment, gender and birth cohort. Only individuals recorded as without occupation between the ages of 15 and 65 are included, as it is evident that a growing number of both deaf and hearing elderly people were unemployed.<sup>41</sup> The bars represent the percentages of men and women in each category who were registered as being without employment at least once during their economically active years, relative to the total number of men and women aged between 15 and 65 in the category. A person who was registered as without occupation several times is counted once.

**Figure 4.1** Unemployment according to birth cohort, environment and gender from ages 15-65, in %



Source: MS Access database, research individual file

When comparing the deaf with the sibling cohort, the much higher incidence of unemployment among the deaf in all groups – except for rural women in birth cohort 2 – is striking and a first indication of economic discrimination. Deaf individuals, women and city dwellers in particular, were much more frequently registered as being without an occupation. The higher incidence of unemployment in the cities confirms the assumption that urban life provided fewer economic opportunities for individuals with a dis-

<sup>41</sup> The employment characteristics of the elderly research population are scrutinized in Chapter 7 (7.3.1).

ability. Although siblings living in the city were also more often unemployed, differences with the countryside were much smaller. As no continuous occupational information is available, it is impossible to make statements about the duration of unemployment. It is possible that individuals listed without occupation were just temporarily without gainful employment, for example because the registration took place during winter when employment opportunities, especially in agriculture, were scarcer. However, it is noteworthy that all the hearing brothers were registered as unemployed only once. Of the deaf unemployed men, however, 16.7 percent were registered as without occupation more than once. The average span between the first and last registration of unemployment was on average 20.8 years, suggesting that these men were more structurally unemployed.

In the course of the nineteenth century, unemployment rates rose in both urban and rural areas in both the deaf and the sibling cohorts. The growth of unemployment in the second birth cohort compared to the first is illustrated in more detail in table 4.4.

**Table 4.4** Development of unemployment rates, birth cohort 2 vs birth cohort 1, in %

	Urban		Rural		Mean	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Deaf cohort	+8.1	+11.7	+18.6	+15.5	+13.4	+8.8
Sibling cohort	+7.7	-2.3	+6.8	+37.4	+7.3	+17.6

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Except for the urban hearing women, all cohorts witnessed an increased registration as without occupation. However, caution is required in the interpretation of the results. Above all, these growth rates show an increase in the *registration* of unemployment, and not necessarily a similar growth in actual unemployment rates. Due to the more regular registration of the second birth cohort in population registers, job descriptions are available more frequently. Hence, (temporary) unemployment can be detected more easily in the second birth cohort. As a result, growth rates may have been overestimated. Nonetheless, the rates can be compared to one another as the registration increased for all groups equally.

Deaf unemployment experienced the highest increase in rural areas, in the male cohort especially. This was also the case for hearing women, who witnessed an increase in unemployment of over 37 percent. The sharp increase in the registration of female unemployment in the countryside, and of male unemployment to a certain extent, can be related to technical developments in agriculture. In the nineteenth century, the rural linen industry lost the competition against mechanized cotton and linen production. As the cottage textile industry was mainly a female activity, female employment was struck the hardest. Besides textile manufacturing, rural women had traditionally been involved in raising livestock, particularly for dairy products. For example, they milked

cows and prepared butter, cheese and so on.<sup>42</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century, however, livestock farming and dairy production changed in character with the arrival and spread of factory dairying – often based on cooperative enterprises. Initially this led to the creation of small-scale, cheap, hand-powered creameries, but by the turn of the century production came to be concentrated in larger, steam-powered factories.<sup>43</sup> Together with a general fall in the employment of female day labourers, formal female participation in the rural labour market declined. The observation that unemployment among the rural deaf men underwent an increase almost three times as high as their brothers suggests that deaf men also occupied a more vulnerable position on the rural labour market, comparable to that of women.

In the analysis so far, I have distinguished between urban and rural areas. However, in Chapter 2 I reasoned that urbanization is an ambiguous variable for measuring industrialization. To measure the effect of industrialization on the lives of the deaf, I classified the municipalities in the dataset into three levels of industrialization from 1850 onwards (see 2.3.1). Accordingly, a municipality could be assigned a non-industrial, semi-industrial or industrial status. Table 4.5 presents the percentages of (un)employed individuals according to these levels of industrialization. The employed columns (E) give the percentages of individuals between the ages of 15 and 65 who were never registered as without occupation. The unemployed columns (U) include those individuals who were registered as without occupation at least once during the period under observation (ages 15-65). The percentages are calculated alongside the level of industrialization and gender (row percentages). For example, 62 percent or 16 of the 26 deaf men who were living in an industrial setting were never unemployed. The remaining ten men (38 percent) did experience unemployment.

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<sup>42</sup> Lambrecht, T. (2001) “Slave to the Wage? Het dienstpersoneel op het platteland in Vlaanderen (16de-18de eeuw)” *Oost-Vlaamse Zanten. Tijdschrift voor Volkscultuur in Vlaanderen*, 76, 32.

<sup>43</sup> For more on the developments in cattle breeding and dairy farming: Bieleman, J. (2005) “Technological Innovation in Dutch Cattle Breeding and Dairy Farming, 1850–2000” *The Agricultural History Review*, 53/2, 229-50; Lambrecht, T. et al. (2012) “Werk potverblommen of de dood, het gemeyn dat word teveel gekloot: Boeren, landbouw en de plattelandssamenleving” In: Dumolyn, J. & Mampaey, T. (eds.) *België: een geschiedenis van onderuit*. Berchem: EPO, 39-75.

**Table 4.5** (Un)employment according to industrialization (birth cohort 2), in % (N=248)

	Industrial				Semi-industrial				Non-industrial			
	Men		Women		Men		Women		Men		Women	
	E	U	E	U	E	U	E	U	E	U	E	U
Deaf	62	38	32	68	67	33	40	60	76	24	70	30
Siblings	93	7	52	48	100	0	30	70	92	8	72	28

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Notes: N=65 deaf men, N=51 deaf women, N=70 brothers, N=62 sisters

Table 4.5 indicates the negative impact of industrialization on the incidence of unemployment for the deaf. Unemployment rates are the highest in industrial areas and lowest in non-industrial settings. Semi-industrial municipalities, generally rural in nature but located in the immediate surroundings of an industrial area that attracts commuting labourers, form an area of transition. The influence of industrialization on the sibling cohort is only noticeable in the unemployment rates of the sisters. Nevertheless, the difference between unemployment in industrial and non-industrial areas is significantly smaller than in the deaf research population. Among the hearing men, (un)employment rates are similar across all regions. In all categories, except among the women living in a semi-industrial municipality<sup>44</sup>, deaf unemployment rates are remarkably higher.

Differences in unemployment between the deaf and the hearing cohorts become even clearer when calculating the mean and median age at the time without occupation was registered (table 4.6).

**Table 4.6** Mean (M) and Median (Md) age at unemployment, in years<sup>45</sup>

	Birth cohort 1				Birth cohort 2			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	M	Md	M	Md	M	Md	M	Md
Deaf cohort	45.7	44.6	42.6	38.6	33.4	24.1	39.7	39
Sibling cohort	-	-	50	53.4	43.6	60.1	33.8	31.9

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Notes: N=30 deaf men, N=36 deaf women, N=5 brothers, N=32 sisters

Table 4.6 shows that the mean and median ages are lower for the deaf population and in the second birth cohort. It appears that not only were the deaf unemployed more often,

<sup>44</sup> This category contains a limited number of women, respectively five deaf and nine hearing women.

<sup>45</sup> From individuals recorded as “without occupation” multiple times, the youngest age is taken into consideration.



but also that this happened at an (increasingly) earlier age, which was well below the average age of retirement. Jean Henri Seranne, a deaf man born in Ghent in 1792, was 38 years old when he was registered as without occupation for the first time. At the time, he was living with his brother Louis Bernard and Petronella De Keyser, who was cohabiting with Louis Bernard. Jean Henri continued to live with his brother until his death in 1844, and during this period was always registered as unemployed in the population registers. We can assume that Jean Henri's brother, who was a driver, provided for his maintenance.

Deaf women in the second birth cohort constitute an exception to this pattern: the mean and median ages at unemployment were higher for deaf women than for deaf men and hearing sisters. The difference between the deaf women and their hearing sisters might be explained by the much higher likelihood of the sisters becoming a wife and mother, which reduced the time and need for them to work (and increased the likelihood of being registered as without occupation). The difference between deaf men and women might be the result of a bias in the data in favour of young men.

A similar calculation of the mean and median ages according to levels of industrialization can be found in the appendix. Calculations gave no indication that the negative impact of industrialization on the incidence of unemployment also affected the mean age at unemployment. Individuals living in an industrial municipality did not experience unemployment at a younger age than in semi-industrial and non-industrial settings.

#### **4.3.2.2 Unemployment according to residence and socio-economic background**

In the previous paragraphs, I established that deaf men and women were more likely to be unemployed, especially in urban and industrial areas, and at a generally younger age than their hearing siblings.

However, being registered as without occupation does not necessarily imply that individuals led passive lives. Devos, De Langhe and Matthys have shown that single women without a registered occupation were actually active, contributing members of the household, whether as helpers on family farms, spinners in the cottage industry, or as care givers. Married women too were involved in a wide range of activities, such as household work, childcare and informal assistance in the fields or spinning.<sup>46</sup> So even when they were not formally 'employed', women were crucial to the economic survival of the family. In her study into rural female workers in nineteenth-century England,

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<sup>46</sup> Devos, I., De Langhe, S. & Matthys, C. (2013) "Lost in Registration?". See also: Higgs, E. (1987) "Women, Occupations and Work in the Nineteenth Century Censuses" *History Workshop Journal*, 23, 59–80.

Nicola Verdon describes the many strategies women used to make ends meet. Women were involved in washing, sewing and taking in lodgers. They kept gardens and pigs, maintained reciprocal ties with neighbours and they managed their family budgets carefully to make sure that everyone was fed on their limited income.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, it is not unlikely that the deaf contributed to the functioning of the household they lived in by performing household chores without remuneration, or that their occupation was not registered for some reason (see 6.2.3). Yet, parallel with the nineteenth-century relocation of work outside the domestic sphere, these informal activities were perceived as less valuable.

Deaf women were the ones to be most frequently registered as without occupation in both birth cohorts and across environments (urban/rural and according to level of industrialization). It appears to have been even harder for deaf women to find an occupation. However, the higher unemployment rates for women could have been a reflection of their marital status, rather than that of the actual situation. As mentioned above, sources tend to dismiss the economic activities of married women in favour of the occupation of their husbands. Indeed, all the hearing sisters of the first birth cohort were either married or widowed at the time they were registered as without occupation. In the second birth cohort, this was the case for 83 percent of the sisters. Yet only one deaf woman in the first birth cohort (8 percent) and 2 women in the second birth cohort (4 percent) were married at the time of unemployment. Thus the low marriage rates among the deaf women make it unlikely that they were registered as unemployed because they could rely on the financial support of their husbands or were engaged in the unpaid domestic activities involved in running a family.<sup>48</sup> If these women were not supported by their husbands, who provided for their maintenance?

### **Residence and (un)employment**

An alternative explanation might relate to the residential situation of the unemployed deaf women (and men). In a study conducted by Devos, De Langhe and Matthys, the listing of single women's occupations in the population census of 1814 was related to the household situation they lived in. The historians argue that women without a listed occupation were more likely to live with close kin, especially if the head of the household owned property, as opposed to single women with a listed occupation. Similarly, the higher number of unemployed deaf men and women may be related to their residential

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<sup>47</sup> Verdon, N. (2002) *Rural Women Workers in Nineteenth-Century England: Gender, Work and Wages*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press.

<sup>48</sup> Similar results are found in the male deaf cohorts. All the deaf unemployed men in the first birth cohort were unmarried, as were 80 percent in the second birth cohort.

situation at the time they were registered as without occupation. A higher number of deaf individuals living in with relatives or being institutionalized, for example, could explain the higher incidence of unemployment among the deaf.

Tables 4.7 and 4.8 relate the registration of (un)employment to the residential situation at the time of registration. All the occupational listings of the 526 deaf and hearing research individuals are taken into account. This implies that individuals were counted several times if they had an occupation recorded in different sources. For example, Benoit Van Assel was recorded as a labourer in the birth certificates of his seven children and in his death certificate, and is thus taken into account eight times in table 4.7. At each moment of registration, his residential situation is evaluated in relation to his occupation.<sup>49</sup>

**Table 4.7** Employment and residential situation, birth cohort 1, in % (N=832)

	Men				Women			
	Deaf		Siblings		Deaf		Siblings	
	E	U	E	U	E	U	E	U
<b>N=</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>11</b>
Institutionalized	2	7	1	0	4	17	1	0
Living in	19	50	9	0	69	42	13	9
Living independently (HH)	14	29	23	0	16	8	26	82
Living alone	9	0	2	0	0	0	10	0
Living together	82	50	94	0	45	100	83	100
Unknown	9	50	4	0	55	0	7	0
%	100	100	100	0	100	100	100	100
Situation unknown	65	14	67	0	11	33	60	9
Living together	68	50	98	0	50	50	98	100
Unknown	32	50	2	0	50	50	2	0
%	100	100	100	0	100	100	100	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Notes: E=Employed, U=Unemployed, HH=Household Head

Table 4.7 illustrates the different living arrangements of the first birth cohort. When comparing the residential situation of the employed deaf men and their employed brothers, the differences appear to be relatively small. This is partly the result of the high percentages of individuals living in an unknown residential situation (65 and 67 percent). The absence of population registers for a large part of the first research period

<sup>49</sup> Therefore, the percentages do not show the percentage of research individuals, but of recorded occupations.

complicates the distinction between independent and resident individuals. However, a more in-depth study of the household composition of the listings in the category *situation unknown* shows that in respectively 95 percent and 98 percent of the cases of the deaf and hearing men *living together*, the men were living with their spouse and often their offspring. Most likely, therefore, they were living in an independent household. The living situation of the majority of the hearing sisters was also unknown. Similar to the men, almost all of them were living with their husbands. The men and hearing sisters living in an *independent* household were also predominantly living together with their spouses (respectively 75, 82.7 and 79.2 percent).<sup>50</sup>

The deaf women constitute an exception to this pattern. Most of the occupational records of employment of the deaf women ('E' columns) were made when they were *living in another household*. In 83 percent of the cases, they were living in the parental household or in the household of a sibling. The women had an average age of 40.6 (median 38.7) at the time of registration. An average age at registration of around 40 years makes it unlikely that most of these women are yet to set up a traditional household with a spouse and children. Similarly, deaf women in an *independent* household were more commonly residing with siblings (80 percent) as opposed to spouses.

Differences among the deaf and hearing siblings who were registered as without occupation ('U' columns) are more pronounced. Strikingly, both deaf men and women were predominantly living in another household at the time of unemployment (50 and 42 percent). In the majority of the cases, they lived with their parents or siblings (86 percent of the male registrations and 66 percent of the female registrations).<sup>51</sup> The second most common residential situation for the unemployed deaf with a known residential situation differed between men and women. Deaf women more often lived in an institution. It seems evident that institutionalization complicated the practice of an occupation or rendered employment redundant. Nonetheless, the percentages of registered employment in an institutionalized context in the deaf and sibling cohort ('E' columns) indicate that institutionalization did not prevent practicing an occupation.<sup>52</sup> Deaf men were more often head of an independent household, although they never lived entirely

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<sup>50</sup> The other 25 percent of the deaf men lived either with siblings or with unrelated individuals; 17.3 percent of the brothers lived together with their children or unrelated individuals; 20.8 percent of the sisters lived together with siblings.

<sup>51</sup> The remaining men and women resided either in the house of a family member or of family-in-law. Joanna Maria Van Avermaet was the only deaf person in the first birth cohort to live in with an unrelated person.

<sup>52</sup> Keeping the remarks at the beginning of this chapter in mind, however, it can be questioned to what extent the occupation of institutionalized individuals represented an occupation that was actually practised as opposed to a registration of a person's occupation before entering the institution. See Chapter 7 for more on the opportunities for working inside an institution.

by themselves. The vast majority of unemployed hearing sisters lived in an *independent* household together with their spouse and children. As such, their unemployment was probably the result of the previously discussed under-registration of female employment.

**Table 4.8** Employment and residential situation, birth cohort 2, in % (N=1126)

	Men				Women			
	Deaf		Siblings		Deaf		Siblings	
	E	U	E	U	E	U	E	U
<b>N=</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>410</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>65</b>
Institutionalized	15	72	2	20	15	61	1	3
Living in	25	12	17	20	39	28	30	11
Living independently (HH)	52	8	54	20	29	0	46	49
Living alone	18	0	6	0	13	0	3	0
Living together	82	100	94	100	80	0	96	97
Unknown	0	0	0	0	7	0	1	3
%	100	100	100	100	100	0	100	100
Situation unknown	8	8	27	40	17	11	23	37
Living together	25	0	86	100	100	100	97	96
Unknown	75	100	14	0	0	0	3	4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Notes: E=Employed, U=Unemployed, HH=Household Head

Table 4.8 presents the results for the second birth cohort. With regard to the records of employed individuals, the living arrangements of the men and hearing sisters appear to be quite similar to the previous birth cohort – the most important difference being that percentages have shifted from *situation unknown* to *independent living*.<sup>53</sup> The majority of the employed deaf men, brothers and sisters in the second research period were living *independently*. In all the groups, this mainly implied living with a spouse and children in a state of marriage or widowhood. Among the men, living with unrelated individuals occupied a second place. Women were more frequently living with siblings.<sup>54</sup> As in the

<sup>53</sup> The vast majority of employed men and hearing women in the first cohort in an *unknown* situation and *living together* were defined as living in matrimony and were therefore probably independent.

<sup>54</sup> In 81.4 percent of the occupational records of employment of the deaf men, the men live together with a spouse and/or children. 18.6 percent live together with close kin such as siblings or with unrelated individuals. 87.6 percent of the recordings of employed hearing men refer to a living arrangement with their spouse and/or children. 7.6 percent with unrelated individuals, 3.3 percent with siblings and 1.4 percent with other

first research cohort, however, deaf women with a registered occupation were more frequently *living in* another household. The vast majority lived in the parental household (83 percent) or in the household of a sibling (12 percent).

What is notable is the increased percentage of deaf men and women who were *institutionalized* at the time they were recorded as having an occupation. The presumption that the practice of an occupation could be combined with an institutional life, however, is challenged when one takes into consideration the high percentages of unemployed deaf men and women who were institutionalized (72 and 61 percent). The second most common living arrangement of the unemployed deaf was *living in* another household, more specifically living in the parental household (100 percent of the men and 88 percent of the women). The number of unemployed brothers is too small to distinguish any pattern. However, I may note that none of the five unemployed men was married. One person was institutionalized and another was living in the parental household. The three others were either living with a sibling or with unrelated men. The unemployed hearing sisters show a different pattern, as 90 percent of the sisters who were *living together* (either in an independent household or in an *unknown situation*) were married and living with their spouse and/or children.

Based on the combination of occupational and residential data, I conclude that deaf men and women were primarily registered as without occupation when they were living in with family or in an institution. In particular, the second birth cohort shows a strong link between unemployment and institutionalization. The unemployed hearing sisters on the other hand were predominantly married and living with a spouse.

The cause-effect relationship between unemployment and residence is difficult to determine. On the one hand, we can assume that unemployment led deaf men and women to live in the households of family or to enter an institution. Unable to provide for themselves, deaf men and women may have been dependent on the support of others or institutions for their survival. On the other hand, living with family who could provide for them may have diminished the need for deaf individuals to find employment outside the home. Similarly, it may have been unnecessary or difficult for men and women living in an institution to exercise a profession. However, I argued that being registered unemployed does not necessarily imply that deaf men and women did not contribute their mite to the household or institution they were residing in. In Chapter 6, I look into

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family members; 91.1 percent of the female hearing records of employment occur in a setting of matrimony or widowhood. In 7.1 percent, the women live together with siblings, in 1.8 percent with unrelated individuals. In 66.6 percent of the female deaf records, the deaf women live together with their spouse and/or children, in 25 percent with siblings, in 8.3 percent with unrelated individuals.

the occupations of the deaf according to their living situation, and discuss their opportunities to contribute to the maintenance of the household they lived in.

### **Socio-economic status and (un)employment**

A final variable that I examine in relation to unemployment is socio-economic status (SES) based on the highest ranked occupation of the research individual's father. Indeed, we can assume that the deaf sons and daughters of farmers and middle-class fathers were more likely to be without occupation. On the one hand, there was less need for them to work, and on the other, especially if they lived in a farming family, they could contribute to the family business in an informal way that was not picked up by civil officials.

Starting from the SOcial POWER classification scheme, I have divided the occupations of the research individuals' fathers into three categories. The first category of unskilled labourers (SOCPO code 1) consists of fathers registered as day labourer, worker, factory worker or farm labourer. The second category of semi-skilled and skilled workers (SOCPO codes 2 and 3) comprises a wide variety of occupations. In most cases it concerns craftsmen, with weavers, tailors, masons and millers being the most commonly occurring occupations. The category of middle-class families (SOCPO codes 4 and 5) consists mainly of farmers, innkeepers and shopkeepers. Farmers and salesman are classified as middle class in the SOCPO scheme, as it is assumed that they were likely to own property.<sup>55</sup> The representation of the three socio-economic groups in the dataset is shown in table 4.9.

In the first birth cohort, research individuals mainly belonged to the middle class – they were primarily the children of farmers. The research individuals in the second cohort mostly had fathers who were skilled or semi-skilled workers. Two observations should be made in the interpretation of table 4.9. First, the deaf and siblings originate from the same parental households, making the number of individuals in each SES double the size of the number of fathers. Second, the representativeness of the distribution over the socio-economic groups is somewhat distorted by only taking into account the highest rated occupation of the father. This accounts for the low number of research individuals originating from an unskilled father. Nevertheless, the table indicates a shift in the course of the nineteenth century from the primary to the secondary sector, which is consistent with general socio-economic changes.

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<sup>55</sup> A list of occupations and their respective SOCPO codes can be found in the appendix.

**Table 4.9** SES according to birth cohort, in % (N=492)

	<b>Birth cohort 1 (N=245)</b>	<b>Birth cohort 2 (N=247)</b>
Unskilled	16.7	9.7
(Semi-)skilled	17.6	49.8
Middle class	45.7	39.8
Unknown <sup>56</sup>	20	0.7
<i>Total</i>	100	100

Source: MS Access database, research individual file and parental household file

The relationship between SES and employment, according to birth cohort and research group, is represented in tables 4.10 and 4.11. The incidence of unemployment is calculated in each category (row percentages). For example, none of the deaf men with an unskilled father were unemployed – 100 percent were employed.<sup>57</sup>

**Table 4.10** Employment and SES, birth cohort 1, in % (N=245)

	<b>Men</b>				<b>Women</b>			
	<b>Deaf (N=78)</b>		<b>Siblings (N=70)</b>		<b>Deaf (N=43)</b>		<b>Siblings (N=54)</b>	
	<b>E</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>U</b>
Unskilled	100	0	100	0	60	40	78	22
(Semi-)skilled	80	20	100	0	100	0	88	12
Middle class/elite	87	13	100	0	69	31	93	7
Unknown	87	13	100	0	73	27	88	12

Source: MS Access database, research individual file and parental household file

Based on the percentages in table 4.10, I find no immediate evidence of a socio-economic differentiation in the incidence of unemployment in the deaf cohorts. Among the deaf men, sons of (semi-)skilled workers were most often unemployed. In the female cohort, it was mostly the daughters of unskilled labourers who were recorded as without occupation. The absence of a distinct pattern in the relationship between unem-

<sup>56</sup> The sources provided no occupation for 49 of the fathers of the first birth cohort, as they died before 1796. One woman in the second birth cohort has an unknown SES because she was an illegitimate child and the father was unknown.

<sup>57</sup> As the distribution over the four categories is unequal – in favour of middle class fathers in the first birth cohort and of (semi-)skilled fathers in the second – calculating percentages of (un)employment across the four categories would make interpreting the results difficult. Since more individuals in the first birth cohort have a middle class father a higher incidence of unemployment in this group may merely be the result of a higher representation in this category rather than a potential negative impact of SES.



ployment and SES suggests that unemployment was not significantly affected by a person's socio-economic background.

**Table 4.11** Employment and SES, birth cohort 2, in % (N=246)

	Men				Women			
	Deaf (N=65)		Siblings (N=70)		Deaf (N=50)		Siblings (N=61)	
	E	U	E	U	E	U	E	U
Unskilled	86	14	88	12	100	0	57	43
(Semi-)skilled <sup>58</sup>	62	38	89	11	39	61	48	52
Middle class/elite	76	24	100	0	64	36	66	34
Unknown	0	0	0	0	0	100	0	0

Source: MS Access database, research individual file and parental household file

The second birth cohort (table 4.11) reveals a higher frequency of unemployment in all socio-economic groups<sup>59</sup>, but again I find no distinct pattern alongside socio-economic groups. Deaf men from all SES groups were more often unemployed compared to hearing men, while unemployment ratios in the female cohorts were generally high.

#### 4.3.2.3 Summary

In August 1924 *De Volksgazet* and *La Wallonie*, a Flemish and a Liège socialist newspaper respectively, published a story about an “unfortunate worker” who was dismissed by his employer because of illness. As a result, his family was reduced to poverty because, as the article states, the man’s wife was deaf-mute and therefore unable to find employment and earn money to provide for her family.<sup>60</sup> In this first section, I explored the incidence of unemployment in the deaf and sibling cohorts. I determined that more deaf individuals, and deaf women in particular, were registered as without occupation at least once – and more often on a structural basis – compared to the hearing siblings. In particular, deaf men and women in the cities and in industrial areas experienced difficulties in finding employment, as at all times one-third of the urban deaf men and two-thirds of the urban deaf women were recorded as unemployed. The general higher job-

<sup>58</sup> In the unemployed research groups, the (semi-)skilled fathers of the male cohorts mainly exercise an occupation in the textile industry (71.4 percent of the deaf men and 50 percent of the brothers). This applies to 42.9 percent of the deaf women. 61.5 percent of the unemployed hearing sisters have a father working in wood and construction or other crafts.

<sup>59</sup> Deaf women having an unskilled father constitute the exception, but this category only contains 2 women.

<sup>60</sup> “Een weerzinwekkend geval” in *De Volksgazet*, August 12, 1924; “Un cas revoltant” in *La Wallonie*, August 10, 1924.

lessness in industrial areas, for deaf individuals in particular, suggested that industrialization had a particularly negative effect on the employment opportunities of deaf people. However, the unemployment rates in industrial municipalities were comparable to those of the cities in the pre-industrial period. As such, the higher unemployment rates do not seem to be an immediate result of industrial transformations, but rather of urban characteristics in general.

Unemployment among the hearing sisters was considerably high as well, but a closer look at the life courses of these unemployed women shows that most of them were married. The poor registration of occupations for married women in vital records can probably account for the high number of unemployed sisters. Civil status cannot account for the unemployment of deaf men and women, though, as the vast majority remained single their whole lives. However, I did find a connection between unemployment and residential situation. The vast majority of unemployed deaf men and women were living in with family, mostly parents and/or siblings, or were residing in an institution. These living arrangements may have affected the possibility and necessity of seeking employment. Socio-economic background proved of no significance for the incidence of unemployment.

In line with my assumptions, unemployment among deaf women and men experienced an upsurge in the course of the nineteenth century. As such, the hypothesis of a nineteenth-century deterioration seems to be confirmed. However, two aspects force to put the findings into perspective. On the one hand, the rise in unemployment was not unique for the deaf as more hearing siblings, and especially sisters, were registered without occupation as well. On the other hand, unemployment was already high before the nineteenth century. The higher number of deaf men and women in the second birth cohort without an occupation thus mainly arose from higher unemployment rates in the period before. Yet, to be an unemployed disabled person in the pre-industrial era probably meant something very different in the nineteenth century when the value of paid labour became a principal source of valorisation.

### **4.3.3 Characteristics of the economically active population**

Economic discrimination is not only reflected by the higher rate of unemployment, but also by the extent to which deaf individuals had access to the same occupations as the hearing population. This section aims to map the employment patterns of those individuals with a recorded occupation. Omitting the records of unemployment from the analysis, the research is based on 269 unique occupational listings of 193 deaf persons and 374 unique occupations of 246 hearing men and women. *Unique* implies that multiple records of the same occupation are taken into account once. For example, a registration as farmer for the same person in three different sources is counted as one unique

occupational listing. For respectively 61 deaf and 97 hearing individuals two or more different occupations were recorded. The registration of multiple unique occupations for the same person in the registers may be explained in two ways. First, a person could have combined two occupations at the same time. In inland Flanders, characterized by a dominant cottage industry until the middle of the nineteenth century, it was common to alternate occupations in agriculture and textile manufacturing according to the season. In the polder region of Flanders, many men and women tried to supplement their income with day labouring activities. Of those with multiple occupations, 53 percent combined an occupation with activities in the textile or clothing industry. 76 percent combined an occupation with unskilled day labour.<sup>61</sup> Second, a person could have changed profession in the course of their life. For example, 19 percent of the men and women were first registered as a servant before taking on a different occupation. *Life-cycle service*, referring to the phase in life in which youngsters worked as a servant to accumulate money to start their own household, became increasingly important in the nineteenth century. Once married, the person usually changed occupation.

Tables 4.12 and 4.13 show the representation of the economically active population according to gender and environment in seven occupational sectors, largely according to the classification scheme devised by Jaspers and Stevens. *Undetermined* denotes those individuals listed somewhat vaguely as “contributing to their maintenance through labour” in the *Staat van alle de stomme-dooven*. As crafts entail a wide range of occupations, Jaspers and Stevens suggested a subdivision into five types of crafts: textile production, construction industries, food processing, garment trade and other crafts.

Table 4.12 demonstrates a rather similar distribution over the different occupational sectors for the deaf and hearing of the first birth cohort. In the countryside both the deaf and hearing men were mainly employed in agriculture and unskilled labour. The percentages of unskilled labourers deviate somewhat from the averages calculated by Jaspers and Stevens for 1796 (18.5 percent in the countryside, 17.3 percent in the cities, 7.8 percent in Ghent). Most likely the higher percentages in the research population can be explained by the prolongation of the first birth cohort into the nineteenth century. As such, the figures in the table herald the breakthrough of wage labour in the second half of the century. Moreover, the percentages conceal the period of time during which the men were engaged in day labouring. A more in-depth analysis of the male labourers shows that for 65 percent of the deaf and 61 percent of the hearing rural labourers one or more other occupations were registered. Thus in line with previous findings by Chris Vandembroeke, it is probable that day labouring was not full-time employment but

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<sup>61</sup> Individuals combining day labour with textile manufacturing are counted in both categories.

rather a way to supplement income. Rural day labourers were mainly employed in agriculture to help farmers with the cultivation of their farmlands. This agricultural orientation of unskilled labour is also confirmed by the lower number of labourers in the city, where agriculture was of minor importance. In the female deaf and sibling cohort, the majority of the rural women were employed in the textile sector and in agriculture. Both occupations were strongly interlinked in the countryside and in practice many of the women would combine farm work with domestic spinning. This pattern is consistent with the general female occupation profile of the Early Modern Period and early nineteenth century.

**Table 4.12** Employment pattern, birth cohort 1 (aged 15-65), in % (N=337)

	Men				Women			
	Urban		Rural		Urban		Rural	
	D	S	D	S	D	S	D	S
N=	17	26	91	77	9	16	45	56
Agriculture	6	15	32	36	0	0	22	27
Unskilled labour	18	19	29	34	33	12	9	16
Crafts	59	43	23	21	56	38	56	52
Textile production	12	11	16	12	23	13	51	48
Construction	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Food	6	8	4	6	0	0	0	0
Garment trade	18	8	3	3	33	19	5	4
Other	23	12	0	0	0	6	0	0
Trade and transport	0	15	2	3	11	25	2	3
Service sector	0	8	1	4	0	6	0	0
Domestic service	6	0	3	2	0	19	2	2
Undetermined	11	0	10	0	0	0	9	0
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Notes: D: Deaf and S: Siblings.

In the cities, the majority of the male and female research population earned a living as craftspeople or secondarily as unskilled labourers or saleswomen. Minor differences are noticeable when making a distinction between the different types of crafts. Deaf men were not represented in construction as masons, roofers or carpenters, comparatively dangerous trades where hearing was a definite advantage, and to a lesser extent in food processing. On the other hand, they were more likely to be working within the garment trade or within other crafts, for example as a glazier or gilder. Both the deaf and hearing women mainly worked as seamstresses (garment trade) or spinners (textile production).

So far the differences between the deaf and hearing men and women are rather limited – validating the hypothesis of a similar professional profile in the period before industrialization. The main differences in the first birth cohort relate to the sectors of administration, trade and transport and domestic service – occupation types which were much more common among the siblings. These categories comprise occupations such as teacher, police officer and clerk (administration), shopkeeper, innkeeper and trader (trade and transport) and servants and maidservants (domestic service). Differences in favour of the siblings are rather limited in the countryside as these occupations, especially in the pre-industrial period, were more typical of the cities. In the cities, both administrative and trade-orientated occupations were much more frequent among the siblings. Communication skills seem to have been an important prerequisite for both occupation types, which could explain the lower employment rates among the deaf.

A minority of men and women in the countryside worked as a servant or maid in another household. Urban domestic servants were more common in both cohorts, but they exhibit a distinct gender difference. In the deaf cohort, the sector of domestic service was reserved exclusively for men. In the sibling cohort, it was a typical female occupation. There is no clear-cut explanation for the gender difference between the deaf and sibling cohort. The exclusively male character of the job in the deaf cohort was probably caused by a bias in the data in favour of men. As more deaf men were married, a higher number of marriage certificates reporting an occupation at a young age is available for the men. Deaf women were most often unmarried, so their occupational listings were usually acquired at an older age (at death or when population registers became available).<sup>62</sup> As mainly youngsters worked in domestic service, this may explain the absence of deaf female maidservants. Richard Wall calculated that it was financially better for parents to engage their daughters in domestic service, as the loss of the daughter's income was outweighed by the costs for her maintenance.<sup>63</sup> This may explain the female character of domestic service in the sibling cohorts. Perhaps deaf sons were more often sent off to live and work as a servant as they too could contribute more to the parental household by living in another household.

In the course of the nineteenth century differences between the deaf and the siblings became more clear-cut (table 4.13). However, these were not necessarily to the disadvantage of the deaf. In line with general changes in employment in the second half of the nineteenth century and together with the decline of the proto-industrial economic

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<sup>62</sup> Women were on average 41 years old when an occupation was recorded.

<sup>63</sup> Wall, R. (2004) "The Social and Economic Significance of Servant Migration" In: Fauve-Chamoux, A. (ed.) *The Welfare of Widows in Northern Europe 1700-1900*. Bern: Peter Lang, 28-9.

system, there was a universal decline in the importance of agriculture and home-based textile manufacturing.

**Table 4.13** Employment pattern, birth cohort 2 (aged 15-65), in % (N=308)

	Men				Women			
	Urban		Rural		Urban		Rural	
	D	S	D	S	D	S	D	S
N=	17	43	48	70	10	28	33	59
Agriculture	6	2	17	17	0	0	9	25
Unskilled labour	12	19	19	39	0	35	9	22
Crafts	82	61	39	17	80	43	70	27
Textile production	12	16	6	7	10	25	15	19
Construction	0	9	0	3	0	0	0	0
Food	0	5	2	6	0	4	0	0
Garment trade	35	5	31	1	70	14	52	8
Other	35	26	0	0	0	0	3	0
Trade and transport	0	9	2	13	0	11	0	12
Service sector	0	9	0	7	10	0	0	0
Domestic service	0	0	21	7	10	11	12	12
Undetermined	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

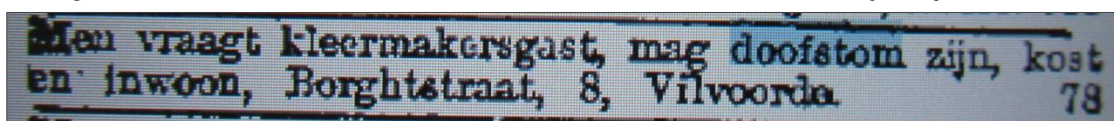
Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Notes: D:Deaf and S:Siblings.

Surprisingly, siblings living in an urban setting demonstrated an increase in the number of listings in textile manufacture. By looking at the specific occupations in the textile sector, however, a different profile from the first birth cohort becomes apparent. Instead of spinners, urban women of the second birth cohort were predominantly lace-workers and involved in fabric processing as furriers. Similarly, the men were involved in fabric dyeing or spool weighing. Some men were recorded as a spinner and weaver, but it is uncertain whether the occupation was practiced at home or situated outside the household. Ludovicus Franciscus Thysebaert, hearing brother of Pierre Thysebaert, was recorded as a factory worker in the population register of 1847 and in his death certificate in 1862. In between, in the population register of 1857, he was recorded as a spinner. This example reinforces my assumption that the hearing men involved in textile manufacturing were not exclusively engaged in the cottage industry, as in the first birth cohort, but were probably working in a textile factory. The vague descriptions of occupations in the registers prevent a clear distinction between the two. The declining importance of agriculture and textile manufacture was accompanied by an increase in the general number of people employed in other types of crafts and in services.

These general changes, however, resulted in a different employment pattern for both research groups. In contrast to the hearing population and to my expectations, the number of deaf unskilled labourers declined. Day labouring was characterized by insecure employment and implied a more vulnerable position on the labour market. That deaf people were not increasingly employed in this sector, unlike their siblings, challenges the assumption of their weakening position on the labour market. Simultaneously, the clothing sector grew to become the most dominant occupation type for deaf men and women. The recognition of the expertise of the deaf in this sector is reflected in newspaper advertisements, in which jobs for shoemakers and tailors specify that the candidates may be deaf-mute (figure 4.2).

**Figure 4.2** Wanted advertisement from *Het Nieuws Van Den Dag*, May 25, 1909<sup>64</sup>



The rise in the number of shoemakers, tailors and seamstresses on the one hand and the decline in unskilled labour on the other, is likely to be related to the development and spread of deaf schools in the course of the nineteenth century. The previous chapter showed that girls were primarily taught to be a dressmaker, seamstress, milliner or servant. Most boys were trained to be a tailor or shoemaker, or were articulated to a master craftsman in the city.<sup>65</sup> Simultaneously, the pupils were taught to read and write in an attempt to facilitate communication with the hearing. It can be assumed that people who could read and write were better socially adjusted and able to participate in the labour market. The vocational training in the deaf schools turned deaf men and women into skilled workers who were presumably better off than unskilled (deaf) workers. It provided them with a worthy alternative to the uncertainty of day-to-day vacancies. The lack of deaf schooling before 1820 could then explain the generally high numbers of unskilled labourers in the first birth cohort: as they were uneducated and unskilled, they were more dependent on insecure labour activities. The already higher representation in the first birth cohort of deaf clothing artisans in the cities (table 4.12) may indicate that initially mostly deaf persons from the cities found their way into deaf schools, which were invariably located in urban areas. In the course of the nineteenth century, as general mobility increased and a subsidy system was set up (see 2.1.1.4), attending a deaf school became more conventional in rural areas as well, which finds expression in a spectacular increase in deaf clothing artisans in the countryside. However, education

<sup>64</sup> Translation: Wanted: tailor apprentice, can be deaf-mute, board and lodging, Borghstraat, 8, Vilvoorde.

<sup>65</sup> Buyens, M. (2005) *De dove persoon, zijn gebarentaal en het dovenonderwijs*. Antwerp: Garant, 116.

offered no guarantee of employment, as the rise in unemployment among the deaf in the nineteenth century, discussed in the previous section, clearly shows.

The hearing men and women found employment in other sectors. In the countryside, brothers increasingly earned a living as unskilled labourers or servants, in trade and transport or administration. The two latter types of occupation became more strongly represented in the countryside towards the end of the nineteenth century, but were apparently reserved for the non-deaf. Similarly, rural women were increasingly employed as shopkeepers and innkeepers in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the cities, the largest increase was observed in construction and other crafts, with painting in particular a popular profession among the brothers. The hearing sisters increasingly chose a career as unskilled labourers or textile workers, either in a domestic setting or an industrial setting.

In both research groups an increasing number of rural men and women were employed as servants or maids. In the nineteenth century, working in service became an essential part of life for many youngsters. As more and more people were engaged in full-time wage labouring and owning land became less common, the potential for youngsters to inherit land from their parents to set up their own household decreased. The so-called *life-cycle service* was a way to accumulate money as preparation for starting one's own household. Once married, the young person changed occupation or became a housewife in their own household. The high average age of the deaf servants (42.9, median 43.7) indicates that life-cycle service extended beyond the average age of marriage, as setting up their own household proved to be harder for the deaf. The mean age at registration as servant or maid within the sibling cohort was 31.6 years (median 26).

Relating the employment pattern to levels of industrialization showed no other differences than those alongside the distinction between urban and rural in table 4.13. As urban areas were mostly industrial and rural areas remained non-industrial until well into the nineteenth century, this should come as no surprise. The associated table can be found in the appendix. More insightful is the comparison of the results with the quantitative information available in the *Exposé de la situation du Royaume (1851-1860)* and the data aggregated in Tom De Paepe's master's dissertation.

#### **4.3.3.1 Deaf employment in a comparative perspective**

In the previous paragraphs I found that deaf men and women in East Flanders were more likely to be unemployed and that those who were professionally active were employed in different occupational sectors, to an increasing extent in the second half of the nineteenth century. Certain occupation types, such as a job in administration or trade and transport, appear to have been virtually inaccessible to deaf individuals. Con-



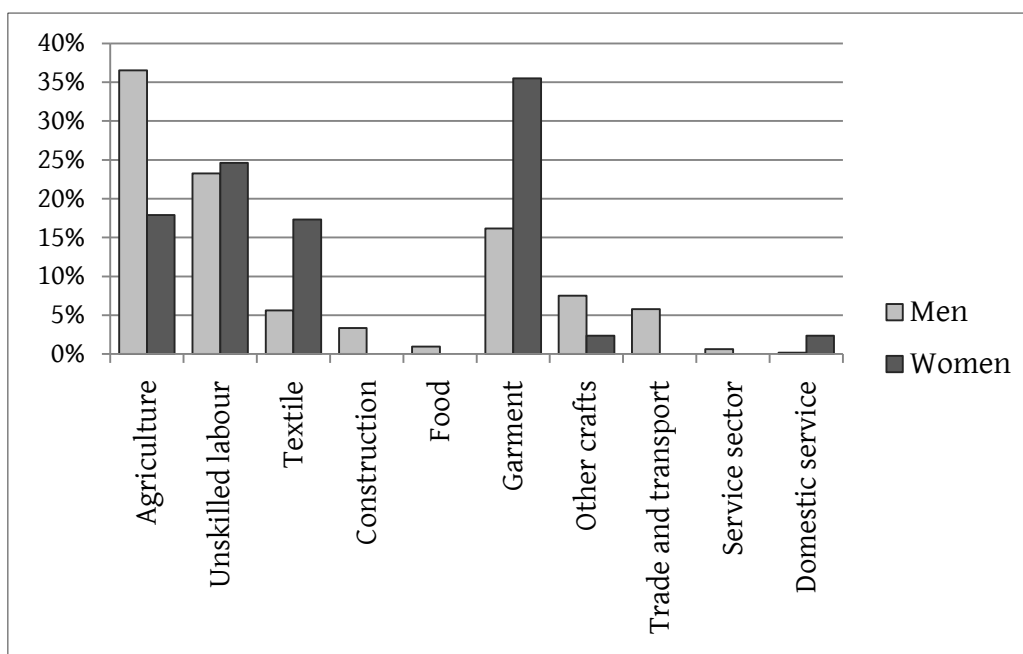
trary to what I expected and to the hearing siblings, deaf unskilled labourers became less common in the course of the nineteenth century, in favour of more highly skilled clothing artisans. To what extent, however, can these findings be transposed to the Belgian deaf population and to disabled people in general? In an attempt to settle this matter, I turn to two unique sources that provide information on the employment of the Belgian deaf on the one hand and of people with other types of impairments on the other, in a time frame similar to that of this study.

The *Exposé de la situation du Royaume* provides a national overview of the number of deaf men and women in each occupation at the time of the population census in 1858. The census officials made no distinction between the regions and age is not taken into account. To be able to make a comparison with the economically active population in this study, I had to find a way to more or less determine the number of Belgian deaf men and women who were between 15 and 65 years old. Based on more demographic statistics in the national overview, I estimated that about 856 and 852 deaf men and women in the census were aged between 15 and 65. The occupational overview, on the other hand, contains 1152 male and 855 female listings. The female list more or less covers the female economically active population. The male list exceeds the number of economically active men by 296 occupations. This excess may be due to the registration of occupations before 15 and beyond the age of 65. Moreover, it is possible that some men, who were active in two or more occupations at the time of the census, were counted multiple times – once in each type of occupation. Of the 855 women, 514 (or 60 percent) were without an occupation or had an unknown occupation; 529 of the 1152 deaf men (46 percent) were either unemployed or had an unknown occupation. Unfortunately, the census officials put both categories into one, rendering it impossible to make accurate statements about unemployment. Nevertheless, the high number of deaf men and women with an undetermined occupational status is in keeping with the high percentages of unemployment in the research population (4.3.2). If I only take into consideration the individuals with a recorded occupation, I come to an employment pattern as represented in figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3 shows that the occupations of the Belgian deaf men and women were concentrated in four sectors: agriculture, unskilled labour, textile production and garment trade. As such, the national situation in 1858 appears to be a mixture of the results of the two birth cohorts. Men were mainly employed as farmers and women were more involved in the textile industry. Both genders were more or less equally engaged in unskilled labour activities. The representation in these sectors is in agreement with the employment pattern of the first birth cohort. Female employment in the textile industry was higher in the research population than at the national level. This difference has a two-fold explanation. On the one hand, the cottage industry had been more strongly affected by the decline of proto-industry in 1858 than in the period in which the first

birth cohort lived. On the other hand, East Flanders was at the heart of the domestic cottage industry, engaging a much larger proportion of the population than other parts of the country.

**Figure 4.3** Employment according to gender (1858), in %<sup>66</sup>



Source: *Exposé de la situation du Royaume (1851-1860)*

At the same time, a significant number of deaf men and especially women were employed in the garment sector. The men mainly worked as shoemakers (59 percent of the garment workers) and tailors (39 percent) and the women as dressmakers (89 percent). With 16 percent of the Belgian men and 36 percent of the Belgian women working in the clothing sector, the percentages are somewhere in between the first and second birth cohort. The orientation of deaf men and women towards the clothing sector has been related to the development of deaf schools. As the province of East Flanders played a pioneering role in the development of deaf education through the establishment of the first deaf school in Flanders, the much higher number of clothing craftsmen in the second birth cohort is not surprising. Moreover, the occupational records of the second birth cohort extend to the beginning of the twentieth century, when the number of educated deaf people was much larger than in 1858. The comparison of tables 4.12 and 4.13 and figure 4.3 leads to the tentative conclusion that the professional lives of deaf

<sup>66</sup> The Exposé records the number of men and women in each specific occupation. I have classified the occupations into occupation types according to the scheme by Jaspers and Stevens.

men and women witnessed a parallel transition across the country in the course of the nineteenth century.

Although the focus in this study is on deaf people, it is interesting to relate the employment characteristics of the deaf to those of people with other types of impairment. In the introduction to this chapter, I put forward the assumption that deaf individuals were less restricted in their employment opportunities than, for example, people with a visual or intellectual disability. Based on the master's dissertation of De Paepe, it is possible to test this assumption to some extent.<sup>67</sup> In his dissertation, De Paepe provided an overview of the occupations recorded for East Flemish men with different types of disabilities at the time of registration (and rejection) in the conscription registers of 1807-1809 and 1846. De Paepe distinguished nine categories of impairment<sup>68</sup>, which I have grouped into four types: physical impairments (1, 2 and 3), intellectual disabilities (7), visual difficulties (4 and 8), and auditory and linguistic obstacles (5 and 6). The latter two refer to men who had minor impairments such as partial blindness, bad eyesight, stammering and minor hearing loss. The two periods under observation fall within the two birth cohorts of this research. This enables a cautious comparison of the employment pattern of the male deaf research population with that of men with other disabilities. The results of the combined analysis are presented in tables 4.14 and 4.15. The first four columns are based on the data of De Paepe. The last column is based on the male deaf research population. The percentages in the deaf research population were recalculated to fit in with the classification scheme of De Paepe. An important difference between the first four columns and the final one is the interpretation of the N value. In De Paepe's research, one occupation was recorded for each research individual (N refers to the number of research individuals). In the final column, the N refers to the number of unique occupational listings. The final columns contain 23 and 26 occupations of respectively 20 and 24 deaf men. Due to De Paepe's selection of men in the conscription registers, all the men were between 20 and 25 years old when the occupation was recorded. To enhance the comparability of the data, I have only taken into account the occupations recorded for the deaf men when they were between 20 and 25 years old.

Table 4.14 suggests that young men having different types of impairments were employed in similar professional sectors at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In line

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<sup>67</sup> De Paepe, T. (2003) *Oost-Vlaamse mannen met een handicap in de 19de eeuw. Een sociaal-demografisch onderzoek op basis van de conscriptieregisters*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished master's dissertation).

<sup>68</sup> (1) Malformations of the upper limbs, (2) of the lower limbs and (3) of the lower limbs and face, (4) Problems with eyesight, (5) hearing or (6) speech, and (7) the intellectually disabled, (8) blind, and (9) deaf-mute. No blind men were registered in 1807-1809 and 1846. The category of deaf-mute men was replaced by my own data.

with general labour characteristics, most men were employed in agriculture or unskilled labour. A substantial number of men worked as textile workers in the cottage industry, characteristic of inland Flanders at the time. More than the other disabled men, however, the deaf men earned an income as craftsmen. In all cases, the deaf craftsmen were employed in clothing manufacturing. It is not possible to make a distinction between the different types of crafts in the other groups. While a considerable number of disabled men were working in domestic service at the time of registration, this was not the case among the deaf men. Based on this small-scale analysis, the lack of communication skills appears to have been an important obstacle to employment as a servant. Being hard of hearing or having minor speech difficulties proved to be less of a problem, as these men had the highest employment rate for working in domestic service.

**Table 4.14** Employment according to type of disability, 1807-1809 and birth cohort 1, 20-25-year-old men, in %

	<b>Physical</b>	<b>Intellect.</b>	<b>Visual</b>	<b>Aud./Ling.</b>	<b>Deaf-mute</b>
<b>N=</b>	<b>871</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>298</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>23</b>
Agriculture	27.5	33.8	22.8	27.8	26.1
Unskilled labour	24.9	22.5	26.5	20.4	26.1
Crafts	14	5	17.4	11.1	21.7
Textile	14.2	17.5	16.4	20.4	17.4
Trade and transport	6.7	5	8.7	0	0
Domestic service	10.8	11.3	7.4	13	0
Without occupation	0.1	2.5	0	3.7	8.7
Unknown	1.8	2.4	0.8	3.6	0
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: De Paepe, based on conscription registers and MS Access database, research individual file

In the middle of the nineteenth century (table 4.15), the differences between the deaf and men with other disabilities became more striking. While unskilled labour was the most common occupation for employed men with physical, intellectual or visual impairments, less than one-sixth of the deaf men were recorded as unskilled labourer. On the contrary, deaf men were mainly registered as tailors and shoemakers (69 percent of the craftsmen). Employment in crafts, with the exception of the textile industry, was less common among the other disabled men. The different occupational pattern of the deaf is most likely explained by the early development of deaf schools. Deaf schools and schools for the blind were the earliest schools developed for special education and provided a variety of specific vocational training. Until the end of the nineteenth century, schools for the 'feeble-minded' were unheard of. The physically disabled or those with minor visual, auditory or linguistic impairments had no special schools. They had to rely on the standard education system. This may explain the similarities of the distribution

over the different sectors between these groups and the hearing siblings (see table 4.13). Unemployment was highest among the intellectually disabled, followed by the deaf.<sup>69</sup> The lower incidence of unemployment among the physically and visually disabled is difficult to interpret as it is uncertain as to what extent the men were actually 'disabled' in the exercise of an occupation. A man who had lost a finger would have been exempted from military service because of a physical impairment, but would have been perfectly able to earn a normal living. The same goes for men who were long-sighted. In comparison to these men, the congenitally deaf men undoubtedly experienced more difficulties in finding and practicing an occupation.

**Table 4.15** Employment according to type of disability, 1846 and birth cohort 2, 20-25-year-old men, in %

	<b>Physical</b>	<b>Intellect.</b>	<b>Visual</b>	<b>Aud./Ling.</b>	<b>Deaf-Mute</b>
<b>N=</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>26</b>
Agriculture	12.5	8.3	22.2	0	11.5
Unskilled labour	28.7	16.7	33.3	0	15.4
Crafts	19.4	0	22.2	33.3	50
Textile	14.5	8.3	0	0	3.9
Trade and transport	6.2	0	11.1	0	0
Domestic service	11.3	8.2	5.6	33.3	0
Without occupation	6.5	58.3	5.6	33.4	19.2
Unknown	0.9	0	0	0	0
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: De Paepe, based on conscription registers and MS Access database, research individual file

#### 4.3.4 Summary

In line with the expectations, the pre-industrial birth cohort showed evidence of a similar employment pattern for the deaf and the hearing – except in occupations that required more communication skills, such as jobs in trade and transport or administration. In the pre-industrial period, however, these occupations were rather exceptional for the majority of the non-deaf as well. Even so, the extent of professional integration in the pre-industrial period is challenged by the high number of deaf men and women who experienced unemployment well before the average age of retirement. With percentages for unemployment about twenty times as high as in the hearing population,

<sup>69</sup> The group of men with a minor auditory or linguistic impairment is not included because of its low numbers.

the employment opportunities for the deaf in the pre-industrial period can hardly be considered equal.

Differences between the deaf and hearing in the distribution over occupational sectors became more apparent in the second birth cohort. However, the changes were not necessarily for the worse. The number of deaf men and women working as an unskilled labourer, an insecure job that was dependent on day-to-day vacancies, declined in the second half of the nineteenth century. This fall is quite striking as wage labour became more common among the siblings and in the population in general. Simultaneously, the decreasing number of farmers and labourers was accompanied by a growing number of deaf servants and clothing craftsmen – which can be considered less insecure and more highly skilled occupations. The vocational training provided by the expanding nineteenth-century deaf education system seems to have been the influential factor here. However, the constant high unemployment rate among the deaf indicates that the benefits of an education were not exclusively positive. In the next section, the relation between education and employment is dealt with in a quantitative and qualitative manner.

#### 4.4 Employment and education

Labour perspectives in today's society are closely related to education and training. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, however, employment (and education) was mainly connected to socio-economic status and for the majority the impact of schooling on the choice of a career was limited.

In the pre-industrial period, the vast majority of the population were employed in a limited range of occupations. Moreover, employment in agriculture or textile manufacturing required little training.<sup>70</sup> Artisanal occupations required more technical instruction, but were taught outside the standard education system in an organization of masters and journeymen. Estimates as to proportion of children who were educated to some extent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries vary from 3 to 50 percent.<sup>71</sup> However, education and choice of career were disconnected as elementary schools focused

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<sup>70</sup> Vandenbroeke, C. (1981) *Sociale geschiedenis van het Vlaamse volk*. Beveren: Orion, 175.

<sup>71</sup> Pirenne, H. (1920) *Histoire de Belgique*. Brussels, v. 5, 305; Put, E. (1990) *De cleijne scholen. Het volksonderwijs in het hertogdom Brabant tussen Katholieke Reformatie en Verlichting (eind 16<sup>de</sup> eeuw-1795)*. Leuven: Universitaire pers, 249.

exclusively on reading and writing, studying the catechism and improving the pupils' moral behaviour.

Attempts were made to improve the general level of education in 1842, when national legislation obliged every municipality to provide for the establishment of at least one primary school within its borders. A fixed percentage of the municipal tax revenues had to be invested in education and a general school regulation was promulgated that specified the minimum requirements of teachers and the curriculum. As a result, between 1843 and 1878 the number of primary schools in Belgium rose from 4,834 to 5,279. However, this expansion did not immediately result in the improvement of the level of education of ordinary men and women. Absenteeism remained high as one in four children stayed at home and in the second half of the nineteenth century only one in three 20-year-olds in Belgium is assumed to have mastered the 1842 curriculum.<sup>72</sup>

In the course of the nineteenth century, in the wake of industrialization, technical secondary schools were established. The technical education system encompassed a wide range of technical schools that offered training with a view to a career in industry, commerce, agriculture or the household. This type of secondary education was intended for the lower classes in society. Nonetheless, the education of most lower class children ended after primary school, at the age of twelve.<sup>73</sup> Until the end of the nineteenth century, these primary schools were mainly concerned with moral education. Only at the end of the century did they become more practically orientated.<sup>74</sup> Children from the middle classes usually extended their primary education with a three-year course at a secondary school that aimed to provide training for lower management positions in commerce, industry, finance and administration. As for upper class and elite children, they followed a secondary education programme of seven years in modern or classical humanities. They were destined for a career as a high public official.<sup>75</sup>

Schooling is most commonly measured by the level of literacy. Information on literacy is available in population censuses from 1866 onwards, in several conscription registers from the second half of the nineteenth century and in official documents such as court cases and inheritance documents. However, the earliest and most general expression of

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<sup>72</sup> Art, J. (2007) "Onderwijs op het platteland" In: Prevenier, W., Thoen, E. & Van Eenoo, R. *Geschiedenis van Deinze, deel 3: het platteland en de dorpen in Deinze*. Deinze: Stad Deinze, 633.

<sup>73</sup> The minimum age of leaving school was raised to 14 in 1914, which saw the introduction of compulsory education in Belgium.

<sup>74</sup> Depaepe, M. (2002) *De pedagogisering achterna. Aanzet tot een genealogie van de pedagogische mentaliteit in de voorbije 250 jaar*. Leuven: Acco, 166.

<sup>75</sup> D'hoker, M. & Henkens, B. (2005) "Van segmentering naar convergentie. Structuur en karakter van het secundair onderwijs in België in de 20<sup>ste</sup> eeuw" In: Depaepe, M., Simon, F. & Van Gorp, A. (eds.) *Paradoxen van pedagogisering. Handboek pedagogische historiografie*. Leuven: Acco, 160-1.

literacy is to be found in parish and civil registers. Since 1778 administrative officials were legally liable to request all parties involved to sign birth, marriage and death certificates. Individuals who were unable to write their name could sign with an X. So literacy can be measured by counting the frequencies of names and crosses in a municipality's records. The application of this method has been challenged as subject to error. Indeed, it may have been that writing skills were limited to writing one's own name, resulting in an overestimation of literacy. On the other hand, individuals may have learned to write as children, but later lost their writing skills through disuse. Furthermore, while in primary schools today reading and writing are taught simultaneously, in the past the focus was on reading first. This implies that some people could have received a basic education, but were still unable to sign. Nevertheless, the method provides a rudimentary indication of the level of literacy in past societies. Based on this method, Vandenbroeke stated that at the end of the eighteenth century and first half of the nineteenth century scarcely half the men and a quarter to a third of the women in Flanders were literate. The increasing impoverishment in the Flemish countryside in the first half of the nineteenth century contributed to an even higher frequency of illiteracy, especially in regions that were dominated by the cottage industry. Textile workers had increasing difficulties in competing with the industrial textile industry, with the result that children were more often put to work at an earlier age. School absenteeism rose in proportion to the extent to which child labour was called upon. In areas with predominantly agricultural activities, such as the polder region of Flanders, children generally enjoyed a longer education.<sup>76</sup> Nonetheless, until the middle of the nineteenth century one in two Belgian men and even more women were illiterate. In some regions in East Flanders, only one person in ten was able to write their name. In the course of the second half of the nineteenth century illiteracy steadily declined, so that by 1900 it was less than 10 percent of the men and women. This decrease has been ascribed to the macro-structural expansion of the educational infrastructure on the one hand, and to a changed attitude towards the importance of reading and writing on an individual level on the other hand. A basic level of literacy was increasingly considered a political, economic, social and cultural necessity.<sup>77</sup>

We have no indication of the level of education of the hearing research population. However, we can estimate their level of literacy based on the frequency with which they signed their marriage certificate and the birth certificates of their children. Parallel with general developments, literacy in the sibling research population rose from an av-

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<sup>76</sup> Vandenbroeke, C. (1981) *Sociale geschiedenis van het Vlaamse volk*, 277.

<sup>77</sup> Matthijs, K. (2001) *De mateloze negentiende eeuw. Bevolking, huwelijk, gezin en sociale verandering*. Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 80-3; Vandenbroeke, C. (1981) *Sociale geschiedenis van het Vlaamse volk*, 270-7.



erage of 46 percent in the first birth cohort (38 percent for the sisters, 53 percent for the brothers) to an average of 63 percent in the second cohort (59 percent for the sisters, 67 percent for the brothers). Born between 1830 and 1860, the second birth cohort was of school age in the initial phase of the drive for improvements in literacy. To illustrate the decisive changes at the end of the nineteenth century: 89 percent of their children with a known level of literacy were literate. Although the emancipatory role of the increase in literacy cannot be underestimated, the brief sketch of the educational situation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries above illustrates how literacy and employment opportunities are difficult to relate. As such, a cross-analysis of literacy and employment would prove of little significance in the hearing research population.

The situation is presumed to have been different for the deaf. Official deaf schools came into existence in Belgium at the beginning of the nineteenth century – the first Flemish deaf school was founded in Ghent in 1820. Locally organized private initiatives existed before that time, but were limited to the happy few. As a result of the establishment of deaf schools, we can assume that as opposed to the general decline in education in the first half of the nineteenth century, the situation for the deaf improved since now they had their own special schools. Moreover, the average age of leaving the *Institut des Sourdes-Muettes* (see 2.1.1.4) indicates that deaf children were educated for a longer time than non-disabled children. This may be related to the perception that education was needed before deaf children could earn money for the family, as opposed to able-bodied children who could work straight away.

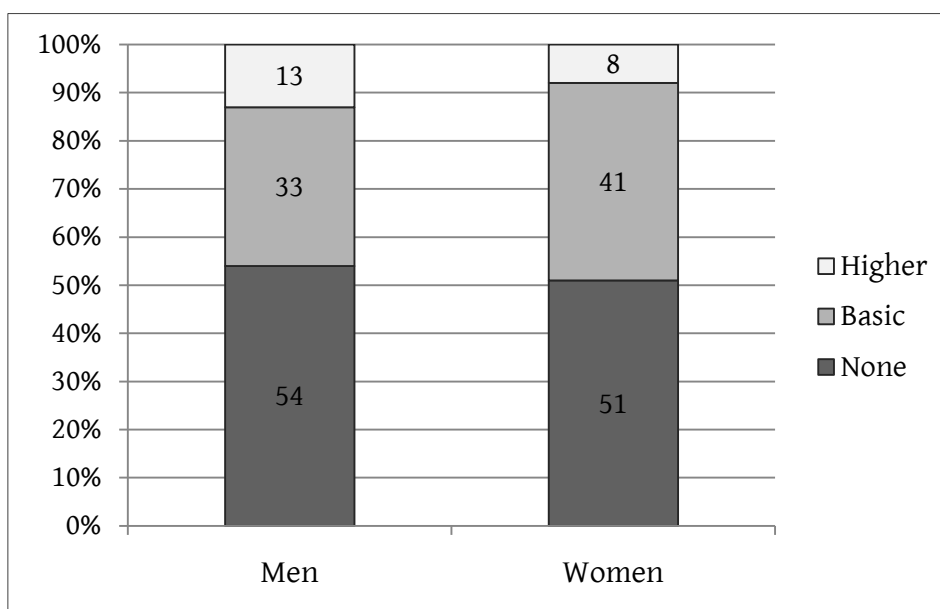
Schooling may have influenced the employment opportunities of the deaf in a two-fold way. On the one hand, an education could facilitate the means of communication between the deaf and the hearing, as they learned to sign, read and write. Cockayne sees the ability to read, write and sign as one of the crucial factors that determined the chances of deaf people finding employment. Having long been perceived as ‘idiots’, their status could change if they were able to show evidence of comprehension and an ability to communicate.<sup>78</sup> In a predominantly oral society, written communication was of less importance to the non-disabled. However, for the deaf the ability to write meant the difference between being able to communicate effectively or not. Thus, people who could read and write were more socially adjusted, perceived to be of higher intelligence, and better able to participate in the labour market. On the other hand, the curriculum of deaf schools provided students with a vocational training, intended to enable pupils to provide for their livelihood themselves after graduation. As such, the schools were more practically orientated than many of the standard primary schools.

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<sup>78</sup> Cockayne, E. (2003) “Experiences of the Deaf in Early Modern England”, 509.

This section aims to examine the extent to which the deaf schools succeeded in their goal of turning their pupils into productive members of society. This implies that the first birth cohort is not taken into consideration. Of the 139 deaf men and women born before 1810, the level of literacy of only 33 individuals is known on the basis of their marriage certificates. The high number of unknown cases can be explained by the lack of documents in which deaf persons had an active role: if a deaf person did not marry, I only have a birth and death certificate – which the deaf person could obviously not sign themselves. Of the deaf with a known level of literacy, 58 percent were able to sign the certificate. However, it is impossible to ascertain whether these men and women were educated in some way or only able to write their names. In the absence of official deaf schools, it seems unlikely that the literate men and women received a noteworthy education.

**Figure 4.4** Level of education according to gender, Belgian deaf population, 1858, in %



Source: *Exposé de la situation du Royaume (1851-1860)*

In the second birth cohort, 96 percent of the deaf women and 87 percent of the men received an education. Of the remaining three women and ten men, it is unknown whether they attended a deaf school. Their names were not found in the lists of pupils of the deaf schools for boys and girls in Ghent, nor did the population registers mention institutionalization in an educational setting. A comparison with the statistics available in the *Exposé de la situation du Royaume (1851-1860)* illustrates that these high levels of schooling were not common for the deaf population in general (figure 4.4). However, the census takes into account all deaf individuals living in Belgium, including those of old age who were children in the period before deaf education was available. Among the younger deaf persons the level of education may have been higher. Moreover, the schooling rates of deaf men and women born in East Flanders were probably higher

compared to Belgium in general as East Flanders was one of the first Belgian provinces with a deaf school. Finally, I should also mention the bias in favour of educated men and women in the dataset as a result of the sources in which the deaf were selected. The entry list of the deaf school for girls, the list of boys registered at the address of the school for deaf boys and the individual bulletins all record deaf men and women with an educated profile. For most of the men selected in the conscription registers it is unknown whether they were educated and literate.

The absence of sufficient deaf men and women without an education in the second birth cohort prevents a comparison of the employment pattern of a group of educated and uneducated deaf, and thus a reliable assessment of the impact of schooling. The only comparison the database permits is the comparison between the educated deaf and the deaf for whom it is unknown whether they were educated or not. However, the small size of the second group only allows the formulation of some very tentative assumptions.

**Table 4.16** Employment of deaf people according to education, birth cohort 2, in %

N=	Men		Women		Total	
	Educ. 67	Unknown 18	Educ. 63	Unknown 4	Educ. 130	unknown 22
Agriculture	9	17	3	25	6	18
Unskilled labour	12	17	3	25	7	18
Crafts	40	33	49	0	45	27
Textile production	3	17	9	0	6	14
Construction	0	0	0	0	0	0
Food	2	0	0	0	1	0
Garment trade	28	11	38	0	33	9
Other	7	5	2	0	5	4
Trade and transport	0	5	0	0	0	5
Service sector	0	0	2	0	1	0
Domestic service	12	11	8	0	10	9
Undetermined	2	0	0	0	1	0
Without occupation	25	17	35	50	30	23
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Table 4.16 suggests that education had an impact on the choice of career of the deaf, but did not protect against unemployment. The educated deaf men and women were more frequently recorded as working in the garment trade, and less frequently as farmers, unskilled labourers and textile workers. The latter two occupational groups are considered of rather low social status. As such, it can cautiously be stated that an education

contributed to the attainment of a higher valued occupation. On the other hand, unemployment after school was also an issue among deaf people. Contemporary deaf critics attributed the bad employment prospects to the poor professional training: the options for a choice of career were limited and the practical training was lamentable. Nonetheless, in his 1900 publication Emile Grégoire, director of the deaf school of Sint-Agatha-Berchem, enumerated a wide range of career options. Deaf schools offered deaf boys training to become “painters, decorators, lithographers, sculptors, engravers, modelers, cabinetmakers, carpenters, printers, typists, gardeners, tailors, cutters, shoemakers, weavers, basketmakers, chair weavers, bakers, and so forth”.<sup>79</sup> However, based on the inspection report of the deaf schools of 1882, historians Liesje Raemdonck and Ingeborg Scheiris concluded in their 2007 study that most deaf schools only offered five different courses. The choice of career was moreover made by the school, whether or not in consultation with the parents. In practice, this resulted in an over-representation of deaf students in the courses for tailors and shoemakers. According to nineteenth-century deaf critics, this led to a surplus of tailors and shoemakers on the labour market, who were in fierce competition for employment with each other and hearing artisans. Another point of critique was that the teachers in charge of the professional training in the deaf schools were usually workshop supervisors, who were inadequately trained to teach deaf students and had insufficient expertise with regard to modern developments in the sector. As the deaf student-tailors and student-shoemakers were mainly employed to make school uniforms and children’s shoes, the gap between the training at school and the demands of their future customers increased. Moreover, the school administration intentionally screened off students from participation in the sector through internships out of fear that they would be exposed to a lack of hygiene and moral guidance. There was less discussion about the education of deaf girls. Raemdonck and Scheiris illustrate how the education of deaf girls was focused on turning them into suitable wives and mothers. At the national congress of the *Belgische Bond der Doofstommenverenigingen* (Belgian Federation of Deaf-Mute Associations) in 1904 in Charleroi, voices were raised against the occupational training of deaf girls. However, some contemporaries pointed out that this lack of training made deaf women incapable of living an independent life, so that after graduation they ended up in the homes connected to the deaf schools or had to live with relatives.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Grégoire, E. (1900) *Aperçu historique des institutions belges en faveur des sourds-muets, des aveugles et des anormaux*. Brussels, 13. Cited by: Raemdonck, L. & Scheiris, I. (2007) *Ongehoord verleden. Dove frontvorming in België aan het begin van de 20ste eeuw*. Ghent: Fevlado-diversus vzw, 139-41.

<sup>80</sup> Bothy, L.-J. (1905) “4<sup>e</sup> Congrès National des 14-15 Août 1904” In: *Le Sourd-Muet Belge. Compte rendu du Congrès International pour l’Amélioration du Sort des Sourds-Muets. Tenu à Liège les 20,21 et 22 Août 1905*. Luik; Raemdonck, L. & Scheiris, I. (2007) *Ongehoord verleden*, 139-46.

Although deaf schools failed to keep all their students from unemployment, the belief in the benefits of education for the deaf is evident from various qualitative sources. An 1866 article in the liberal newspaper *L'Echo du Parlement* emphasized the rewards of an education for the deaf, who were able to “*gagnent honorablement leur vie*” (earn an honourable living) because of their professional training.<sup>81</sup> In announcing the 70-year jubilee of Cyriel, a member of the Brothers of Charity engaged in the education of deaf boys, the reporter of *Het Nieuws van den Dag* did not omit to say that education enabled “those poor deaf-mutes to become intelligent, useful and good members of society”.<sup>82</sup> The story of Hendrik Mahé, published on June 29, 1845, in *Het Handelsblad*, suggests that the training of the deaf was also highly regarded by the general public. The 15-year-old Hendrik, living in a state of poverty, pretended to be deaf-mute and was accommodated in the deaf school of Saint Jacob. When he was discovered to be hearing three months later, he admitted he had pretended to be deaf in order to receive a proper education and vocational training.<sup>83</sup>

## 4.5 Poverty and employment

The lack of means to provide for one's livelihood, whether as a result of unemployment or insufficient remuneration, may lead a person into poverty. In this respect, poverty is connected to employment, and therefore worth considering in this chapter.

Impoverishment and poor relief in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Flanders have been the focus of several national and regional studies.<sup>84</sup> In the context of this study it is not feasible to discuss the topic in all its aspects. After a brief sketch of how poor relief was organized in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the focus is on the relation-

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<sup>81</sup> Article in *L'Echo du Parlement*, December 1, 1866.

<sup>82</sup> “Het jubelfeest van eerw. Broeder Cyriel” in *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, September 29, 1914.

<sup>83</sup> Article in *Het Handelsblad*, June 29, 1845.

<sup>84</sup> E.g. Kin, M. (1982) “Economische transformaties en verarming te Ghent in de achttiende eeuw” *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis*, 8, 34-53; Lamarcq, D. (1981) “Armoede en armenzorg in Het Land Van Aalst in 1795” *Oostvlaamse Zanten*, 56/1, 3-29; Lis, C. (1986) *Social Change and the Labouring Poor. Antwerp, 1770-1860*. London: Yale University Press; De Mecheleer, L. (ed.) (1991) *De armoede in onze gewesten van de Middeleeuwen tot nu*. Brussels: Algemeen Rijksarchief; Soly, H. (1997) “Continuity and Change: Attitudes Towards Poor Relief and Health Care in Early Modern Antwerp” In: Grell, O.P. & Cunningham, A. (eds.) *Health Care and Poor Relief in Protestant Europe 1500-1700*. London: Routledge, 84-107; Winter, A. & Lambrecht, T. (2013) “Migration, Poor Relief and Local Autonomy: Settlement Policies in England and the Southern Low Countries in the Eighteenth Century” *Past and Present*, 218, 91-126.

ship between poverty and deafness. Several authors have expressed the belief that all impaired people in the past were poor and reliant on begging.<sup>85</sup> According to Gleeson, this beggared view of history is the result of uncritically projecting recent experiences of the dependency on facilities and the marginalization of people with disabilities on to past societies.<sup>86</sup> In fact, empirical historical research into the experience of poverty among people with disabilities is almost non-existent. The lack of source material on the material comfort of disabled people is at the root of this lacuna. Nonetheless, a combination of quantitative and qualitative data allows a glimpse into the experience of poverty among the deaf.

#### 4.5.1 The organization of poor relief

*Poverty* is not an easy concept to define as it is both relative and changeable. Relative because its perception depends on what a particular society considers to be the minimum standard of living. For example, an application of the contemporary minimum standard of living to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century population would result in 90 percent of the people falling below this standard.<sup>87</sup> It is changeable as the standard of living is determined by changeable indicators such as food production, housing characteristics, wages and purchasing power.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, the label of *poor* covers a wide range of expressions of poverty. Research into poverty often distinguishes between the structural poor, in need of permanent assistance such as the sick, disabled and elderly, and the cyclical poor who live close to the subsistence level and become poor in times of illness, unemployment or economic hardship. The distinction between these two types of poor people was also inherent in past societies, as shown by a 1795 poverty survey in the Land van Aalst, a region in the province of East Flanders.<sup>89</sup> In the survey, a distinction was made between the “poor, enjoying support from poor relief [armendis]” and the “destitute, requiring occasional relief”. In the course of the nineteenth century, increasing attention was given to another distinction: a distinction between the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor.

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<sup>85</sup> E.g. Safilios-Rothschild, C. (1970) *The Sociology and Social Psychology of Disability and Rehabilitation*. New York: Random House, 12.

<sup>86</sup> Gleeson, B. (1999) *Geographies of disability*. London: Routledge, 62-6.

<sup>87</sup> Kin, M. (1982) “Economische transformaties en verarming”, 25.

<sup>88</sup> Blockmans, W.P. & Prevenier, W. (1975) “Armoede in de Nederlanden van de 14 tot het midden van de 16<sup>e</sup> eeuw: bronnen en problemen” *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, 88, 501.

<sup>89</sup> Lamarcq, D. (1981) “Armoede en armenzorg”, 56.

Until the end of the eighteenth century, poverty was deemed an inescapable reality for a large part of the population and by contemporaries it was described as “*a most necessary and indispensable ingredient in society*”.<sup>90</sup> By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the context had changed. By then the distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor became standard within poor relief systems and stringent laws for the repression of tramps and beggars were adopted, only to make exceptions for “*various unfortunate classes of humanity*”, among them the deaf.<sup>91</sup> People unable to live by their labour, whether due to underpayment, want of employment, or physical or intellectual disability were considered to be deserving, rightful recipients of charity – unlike the undeserving, who were poor because of an unwillingness to work and were getting what they deserved.<sup>92</sup>

The assistance of the deserving poor was organized both in an informal and formal way. On the one hand, they could receive casual, private donations of alms or food. On the other hand, both religious and secular charity institutions were charged with poor support on a more regular basis. The *Tafels van de Heilige Geest* (Tables of the Holy Spirit) organized by the parish were the most important institution of poor relief in the Early Modern Period. The tables were administrated by laymen, the poor masters, but the parish priest, who was often the most informed about the material circumstances of his parishioners, had an important say as well.<sup>93</sup> The tables were mostly financed by the revenues from municipal interest, leases and levies and mainly involved distributing provisions to the poor.<sup>94</sup> In 1796, under French rule, the public poor relief system was reformed into a dual structure that would maintain its influence until 1925. The reform resulted in the establishment of on the one hand the *Commission des Hospices Civiles* (Commission of Civil Hospices), responsible for the accommodation of the needy sick and elderly<sup>95</sup>, and on the other hand of *Bureaux de Bienfaisance* (offices of benevolence), charged with the organization of homecare. Both institutions were organized at the municipal level. The offices of benevolence were responsible for dispensing money, food and other goods. They could intervene in the costs of rent, education and medical assistance and financed the maintenance of residents in institutions such as hospitals, asylums and provisions for the deaf and blind. In the course of the nineteenth century, the

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<sup>90</sup> Colquhoun, P. (1806) *Treatise on Indigence*. London: J. Hatchard, 7.

<sup>91</sup> Fay, E.A. (1879) “Miscellaneous” *American Annals of the Deaf*, 24, 194.

<sup>92</sup> Borsay, A. (2005) *Disability and Social Policy*, 120.

<sup>93</sup> Laenen, J. (1912) “De Tafels van den Heiligen Geest” *La Vie Diocésaine. Bulletin du Diocèse de Malines*, 495.

<sup>94</sup> For more on the “Tafels van de Heilige Geest”: Blockmans, W.P. & Prevenier, W. (1975) “Armoede in de Nederlanden”.

<sup>95</sup> The facilities for indoor poor relief and relief for people with disabilities are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

emphasis would shift from the more traditional dispensation to help in kind and to the maintenance of the 'real', structural poor, unable to provide in their livelihoods.<sup>96</sup>

The Dutch law of 1818 established a commission that had to examine the most efficient ways to combat poverty. Local poor relief institutions had to contribute by investigating the background of the indigent, how they ended up in poverty and how they could be helped. To that end, the offices of benevolence appointed poor masters, who were responsible for gathering information about the indigent in the community, making home visits, distributing aid in kind, advising in matters of admission to the civil almshouses and organizing collections. The municipal law of 1836 provided a more structural relationship between the municipal government and the institutions of poor relief.<sup>97</sup> In the nineteenth century, the municipal government became the most important financier of the poor relief system. To fund the costs of poor relief municipal personal taxes were introduced and, in times of rising poverty, increased. Simultaneously, the amount of private donations and collections declined.<sup>98</sup>

The proportion of indigent individuals over time is difficult to reconstruct as numbers are only sporadically available. Moreover, the number of registered indigent people did not often correspond with the actual number of deprived persons. Nevertheless, general assumptions on poverty can be made based on fluctuations in the number of registered destitutes. On a national scale, poverty ratios fluctuated around 10 percent at the beginning of the nineteenth century, 18 percent at the time of the crisis in 1845-1848, to around 5.7 percent in 1900.<sup>99</sup> The general increase in the spending power of labourers at the end of the century was mostly due to an active social policy of the government. During the nineteenth century, especially at the time of the proto-industrial crisis, the level of impoverishment in East Flanders was among the highest in the country. Vandebroek states that in the early and mid-nineteenth century, up to 50 percent of the

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<sup>96</sup> Vanhaute, E. (2012) "Instellingen van armenzorg in de Antwerpse Kempen in de achttiende en negentiende eeuw: de transformatie van het platteland en de formalisering van publieke zorg" *Post Factum (Antwerpen)*, 4, 185.

<sup>97</sup> Van de Perre, S. (2005) "De dokter der armen. Armenmeesters en andere vrijwilligers bij de burelen van weldadigheid (1796-1925)" *Socia-cahier*, 4, 142-3.

<sup>98</sup> Vanhaute, E. (2012) "Instellingen van armenzorg in de Antwerpse Kempen", 181-2.

<sup>99</sup> Based on: Quetelet, A. (1827) *Recherches sur la population, les naissances, les décès, les prisons, les dépôts de mendicité, etc. Dans le Royaume des Pays-Bas*. Brussels, 59-60; Clement, P. (1995) *De Belgische overheidsfinanciën en het ontstaan van een sociale welvaartstaat 1830-1940: drie benaderingen*. Leuven: University of Leuven (unpublished dissertation), 347-50 & 358-361.



population could be considered poor.<sup>100</sup> Historian Stijn Van De Perre speaks of 20 percent of the population that was destitute in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>101</sup>

#### 4.5.2 Deafness and poverty

Although the presence of an impairment may have led many individuals into economic hardship, we should be careful about equating disability with poverty. In her discussion of medieval disability, Irina Metzler emphasizes the importance of support from family or friends, or independent economic and financial means that could prevent poverty.<sup>102</sup> Hutchison underlines, moreover, that many disabled individuals chose specifically to avoid being reliant on poor relief. Self-sufficiency and independence were the prevailing ethos in the nineteenth century, and many people with disabilities were determined to pursue employment both to show evidence of an independent life and as a matter of necessity.<sup>103</sup> Although disabled people were entitled to poor relief, it does not necessarily imply that all disabled individuals were dependent on it.

Measuring the incidence of poverty among the disabled is complicated by a lack of appropriate source material. Municipal poor lists can provide information on the disabled inhabitants who received communal poor relief. However, without an indication of the total number of disabled individuals within a community it is impossible to make statements about the incidence of poverty. Historian Albert Buurstra found that in the course of the eighteenth century most of the ‘infirm’ on the poor lists in Groningen (Netherlands) suffered from incurable complaints and more and more sensory disabilities. In 1792 about 67.9 percent of the households in Groningen received poor relief because one of the household members was sick. Between 1731 and 1795 the deaf and blind constituted about 16 percent of the sick poor.<sup>104</sup> Lists of the office of benevolence in Ghent show that in the periods 1830 and 1833-1836, they aided respectively 4 and 3 deaf-mute individuals (between 0.01 and 0.03 percent of all registered poor, 2.3 and 5

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<sup>100</sup> Vandenbroeke, C. (1987) “The Regional Economy of Flanders and Industrial Modernization in the Eighteenth Century: A Discussion” *The Journal of European Economic History*, 16/1, 154.

<sup>101</sup> Van De Perre, S. (2005) “De dokter der armen”, 146. More information about the magnitude of poverty before the nineteenth century: Scholliers, E. (1975) “De materiële verschijningsvorm van de armoede voor de industriële revolutie. Omvang, evolutie en oorzaken” *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, 88, 451-67.

<sup>102</sup> Metzler I. (2006) *Disability in Medieval Europe*, 165.

<sup>103</sup> Hutchison, I. (2007) *A History of Disability in Nineteenth-Century Scotland*, 263.

<sup>104</sup> Buurstra, A. (2009) ‘Dese bekommerlijke tijden’ *Armenzorg, armen en armoede in de stad Groningen 1594-1795*. Groningen: Van Gorcum, 270-2.

percent of the ‘incurable’ poor).<sup>105</sup> These figures indicate that the number of deaf individuals depending on poor relief could vary greatly between cities.

The wide distribution of deaf research individuals across the province meant that it was not feasible to search for deaf individuals in the poor lists preserved in municipalities. Nonetheless, for 86 of the 284 deaf research individuals I obtained an indication of their status of indigence. The *Staat van alle de stomme-dooven* (1821) and the individual bulletins (1858) sometimes specified whether a deaf person was indigent at the moment of registration. In the *Staat van alle de stomme-dooven*, information on the state of indigence was given in a random manner. Some individuals were described as “very poor”, “indigent” or “impecunious”, sometimes accompanied by the statement that he or she was “supported by the office of benevolence”; others were “moneyed”, “not in need of assistance” or “in the possession of a small property”. In the individual bulletins, information was less detailed as it was only indicated whether a person was indigent or not. A person’s material situation can also be deduced from their residential situation to some extent. A person in the dataset was considered indigent if they resided or died in a workhouse or poorhouse; not indigent if they had resident servants.

**Table 4.17** State of indigence of the deaf, in %

	Birth cohort 1 (N=71)		Birth cohort 2 (N=15)	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Indigent	38.5	37.5	61.5	100
Non-indigent	61.5	62.5	38.5	0
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

For most of the 86 deaf individuals I only know their state of indigence at one specific point in time. Deaf individuals may not have been indigent at the time of registration, but could have become indigent later on in life and vice versa. Thus the figures in table 4.17 represent a snapshot in the lives of the deaf. Table 4.17 shows the state of indigence of those individuals for whom I have an indication about their standard of living. The deaf men and women were on average 37 years old (median 34 years old) at the time of registration. An analysis of the expenses of the office of benevolence in Ghent shows that the majority of the people relying on poor relief in the second half of the nine-

<sup>105</sup> Van Conkelberge, V. (1997) *Het bureel van weldadigheid te Gent (1821-1925)*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished master’s dissertation), II, 89.

teenth century were over 60 years old.<sup>106</sup> The deaf in the analysis were thus considerably younger. Based on the percentages in table 4.17, I can tentatively state that the majority of the deaf men and women in the first birth cohort were not indigent, although substantially more deaf men and women were poor in comparison to the general population. An 1852 study by P.-C. Vander Meersch into the “state of begging and charity in East Flanders” states that 11 percent of the East Flemish population in 1818 were poor (69,424 out of 648,575 inhabitants) and 12 percent in 1828 (82,494 out of 717,057 inhabitants).<sup>107</sup> Table 4.17 shows that poverty was three times as high in the deaf population, suggesting a hearing impairment made people more susceptible to poverty.

Ignoring the low number of research individuals in the second birth cohort, I can tentatively state that more deaf individuals in the second half of the nineteenth century had difficulties in providing for their own maintenance. A general rise in unemployment and a drop in the standard of living around the middle of the nineteenth century resulted in a peak of 28.3 percent of the total East Flemish population that were poor in 1847. Until the end of the nineteenth century, percentages fluctuated around 20 percent.<sup>108</sup> Despite the general increase of people facing subsistence difficulties, proportionally more deaf men and women were confronted with poverty. This finding is backed up by the figures available in the *Exposé de la situation du Royaume (1851-1860)* for the province of East Flanders. Based on the publication, I have mapped out the percentages of indigent and non-indigent deaf men and women according to living environment at the time of the census in 1858 (figure 4.5).

The graph confirms the over-representation of indigent deaf, especially in institutions. Asylums for the deaf and dumb can be considered a special category of civic almshouses and the admission of deaf individuals to the institutions was therefore partly on the initiative of the institutions of public welfare. The composition of pupils in the *Institut des Sourdes-Muettes*, as discussed in Chapter 2, also indicated the low socio-economic background of many interneers. About 60 percent of the deaf poor in the second birth cohort was institutionalized when they were recorded as indigent.<sup>109</sup> Deaf people living in the cities were particularly vulnerable to ending up in poverty, as well as women in

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<sup>106</sup> In the period 1858-1900, an average of 55.7 percent of the registered poor were over 60 years of age. Based on calculations on the numbers provided by: Van Conkelberge, V. (1997) *Het bureel van weldadigheid te Gent (1821-1925)*, 100-1.

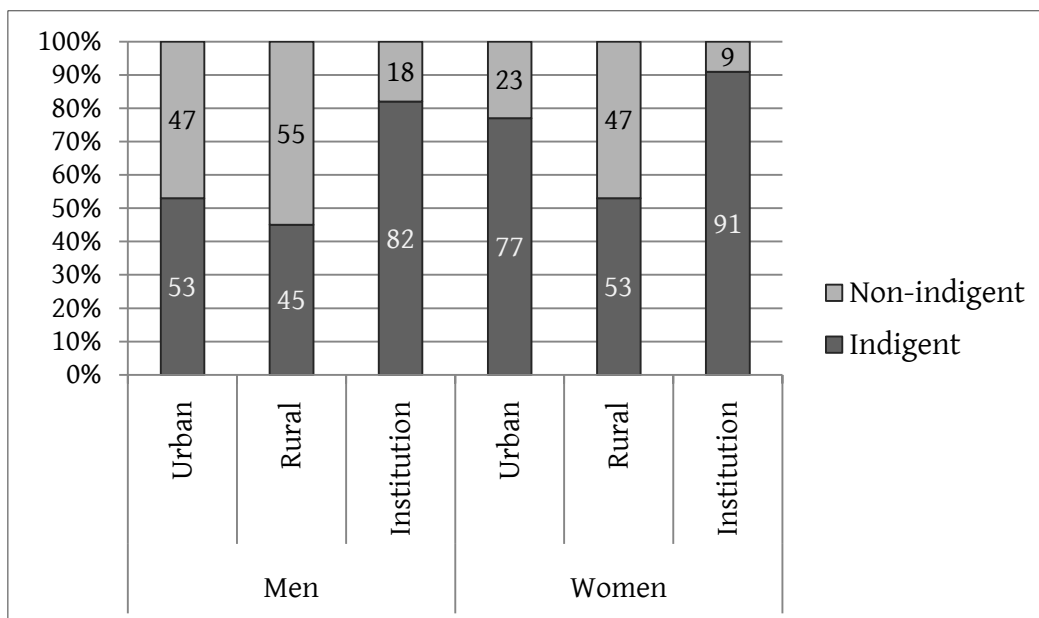
<sup>107</sup> 60 of the 71 records of the state of indigence come from the *Staat van alle de stomme-doven*, dated 1821. The percentage of registered poor individuals in 1821 probably varies between the figures available for 1818 and 1828. Vander Meersch, P.-C. (1852) *De l'état de la mendicité et de la bienfaisance dans la province de la Flandre Orientale, depuis le règne de Marie-Thérèse jusqu'à nos jours (1740-1850)*. Brussels: M.Hayez, 62.

<sup>108</sup> Vander Meersch, P.-C. (1852) *De l'état de la mendicité*, 62; Van Overbergh, C. (1900) *Réforme de la bienfaisance en Belgique. Résolutions et rapport général de la commission spéciale*. Brussels: A. Lesigne, 84-5.

<sup>109</sup> The remaining 40 percent were living in with parents.

general. These findings correspond to the distribution of unemployment, which was highest in the cities and among women.

**Figure 4.5** State of indigence according to living environment, East Flanders 1858, in %



Source: *Exposé de la situation du Royaume (1851-1860)*

Keeping in mind the low marriage rates among the deaf, we can assume that most of the indigent deaf in figure 4.5 were unmarried.<sup>110</sup> Previous studies have confirmed that more than half the registered poor were female – mainly widows, single mothers and unmarried women.<sup>111</sup> Some of them undoubtedly combined a single status with an impairment. However, being single did not automatically imply poverty. Around 89 percent of the indigent deaf in the first birth cohort were unmarried when registered as indigent. Nonetheless, this was also the case for 86 percent of the non-indigent deaf. In contrast to the general population where poverty was more common among single persons, we have no reason to presume that civil status had an effect on the opportunities for the deaf to scrape a living together.

<sup>110</sup> Only 1.7 percent of the East Flemish deaf were married or a widow(er) at time of the census in 1858. 14 of the 15 deaf individuals with a known state of indigence in the second birth cohort were unmarried.

<sup>111</sup> Bassens, J. (1987) *De openbare weldadigheid te Brugge, 1776-1830. Een instrument in de sociale politiek van de Brugse elite*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished master's dissertation), 83-4; De Langhe, S. (2013) *Oude vrijsters: bestaansstrategieën van ongehuwde vrouwen op het Brugse platteland, late achttiende eeuw-begin negentiende eeuw*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished dissertation), 369-71; Buurstra, A. (2009) 'Dese bekommerlijke tijden', 266.

Contrary to what one would expect, most of the registered poor were not without an occupation. In fact, being employed was often a prerequisite for receiving support.<sup>112</sup> Statistics by Vander Meersch show that 35 percent of the registered poor in 1818 were employed as unskilled labourers and 35 percent in textile production as weavers or spinners. Sofie De Langhe too found that the majority of unmarried women on poor relief in the castellany of the Liberty of Bruges were either spinners or unskilled labourers.<sup>113</sup> The combination of agricultural work with day labour or textile production was an integral component of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Flanders, whereby day labouring and spinning was a part-time activity to supplement income. However, research has suggested that unskilled labour and textile production often constituted the only occupation of the poor.<sup>114</sup> Entirely dependent on this source of income, they frequently found themselves in a state of poverty. Scholars such as Bridget Hill have illustrated how the low remuneration from unskilled labour and textile production was insufficient to provide for the livelihoods of many.<sup>115</sup>

**Table 4.18** State of indigence and occupation of the deaf, birth cohort 1, in % (N=46)

	<b>Indigent</b>	<b>Non-indigent</b>
<b>N=</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>28</b>
Agriculture	5	25
Unskilled labour	30	25
Crafts	40	13
Textile production	5	6
Construction	0	0
Food	0	0
Garment trade	20	7
Other	15	0
Trade and transport	0	3
Service sector	0	0
Domestic service	0	3
Undetermined	10	25
Without occupation	15	6
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

<sup>112</sup> Lis, C., Soly, H. & Van Damme D. (1985) *Op vrije voeten? Sociale politiek in West Europa (1450-1914)*. Leuven, Kritak, 28.

<sup>113</sup> De Langhe, S. (2013) *Oude vrijsters*, 370-1.

<sup>114</sup> Mechant, M. (2006) *Levensomstandigheden en overlevingsstrategieën van armen in het Land van Nevele (1690-1789)*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished master's dissertation), 158.

<sup>115</sup> Hill, B. (2001) *Women Alone: Spinsters in England, 1600-1850*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 30-1.

The relationship between the state of indigence and occupation of deaf people for the first birth cohort is presented in table 4.18. The table takes into account 18 of the 27 indigent persons and 28 of the 44 non-indigent persons in the first birth cohort, for whom an occupation was recorded at the time of registration of the state of indigence. The analysis is not applied to the second birth cohort as the occupation is known for only four individuals.

The high number of indigent deaf people with an occupation (85 percent) confirms that having a job could not always prevent poverty. This may have been due to low remuneration, but could also reflect high job insecurity (compare the high number of unskilled labourers) or the inheritance of intergenerational poverty. The fact that 11 of the 27 indigent deaf individuals (40.7 percent) were most likely living in poverty while residing with their parents or siblings affirms the latter.<sup>116</sup> Most of the indigent deaf were employed in unskilled labour or crafts. While tailors, shoemakers and seamstresses generally faced fewer subsistence problems (respectively 1.5, 1.1 and 0.6 percent of the poor in 1818 had such occupations), most deaf clothing artisans were indigent.<sup>117</sup> The much higher incidence of poverty among deaf clothing artisans may be a sign of lower remuneration and appreciation of craftsmen who were disabled.

Although the income from employment undeniably influenced the state of wealth of deaf persons, in practice we can assume that many of them could fall back on the combination of an “*earned income (of all sorts) with savings and loans, the support of family and neighbours, the claiming of benefits and the help of charity.*”<sup>118</sup> The system of poor relief to which the deaf were entitled discussed above, can be considered as a type of benefit and charity. The support of family and neighbours, whether financial or not, is a more informal kind of support and therefore more difficult to assess. In Chapter 6, I look in more detail into informal networks of care and mutual support. However, one particular type of mutual protection against poverty that is worth mentioning in this context are the mutual health insurance schemes, which many deaf clubs organized in the nineteenth century. Unable to take part in the existing mutual health insurance schemes and because of the difficulties of attaining a leading position in the organizations of the hearing, many deaf clubs established their own welfare provisions. The aspiration of

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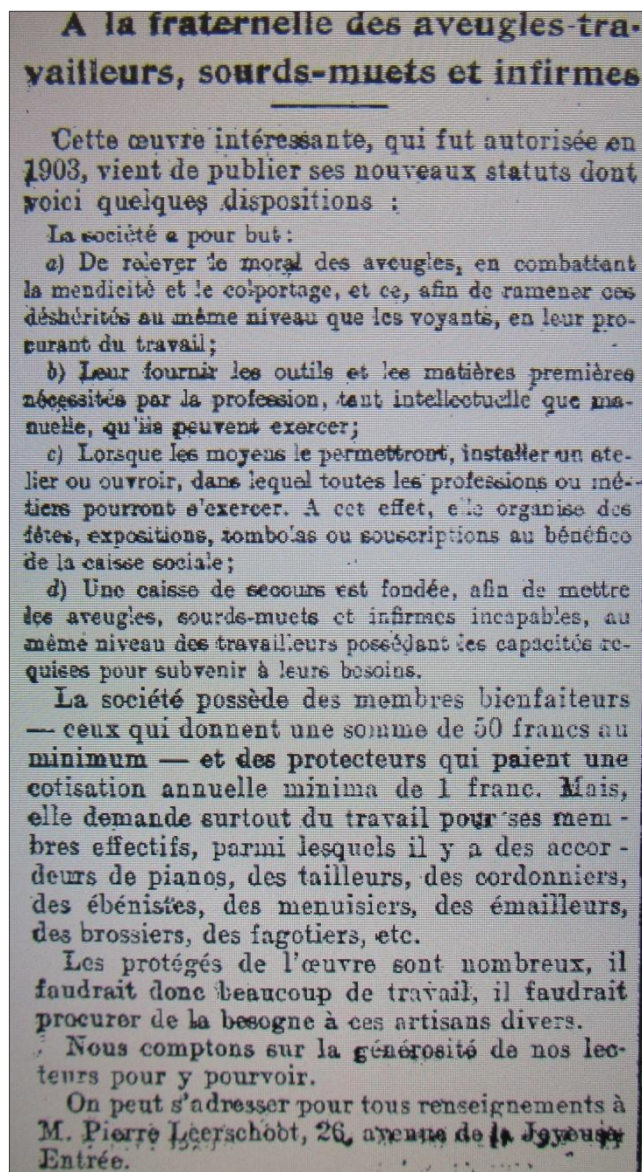
<sup>116</sup> 5 individuals (18.5 percent) were institutionalized, and for the remaining 11 individuals no information is available about their residential situation. 60.5 percent of the non-indigent deaf were living in with family.

<sup>117</sup> A calculation of percentages according to occupation type (horizontal) instead of state of indigence (vertical) indicates that 66.7 percent of all clothing craftsmen were indigent – as opposed to 33.3 percent non-indigent. Vander Meersch, P.-C. (1852) *De l'état de la mendicité et de la bienfaisance dans la province de la Flandre Orientale*.

<sup>118</sup> Kidd, A. (1999) *State, Society and the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2.

deaf clubs to improve the employment opportunities and provide financial support is nicely illustrated in an article in *L'Echo de la Presse* of March 11, 1916 (figure 4.6).

Figure 4.6 Article published in *L'Echo de la Presse*, March 11, 1916

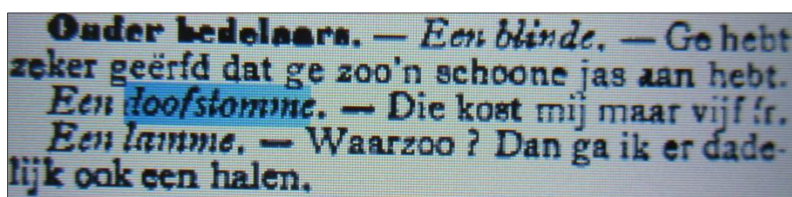


The article lists the statutes of an association for blind, deaf-mute and disabled workers founded in Brussels in 1903. The association puts forward four main goals: 1) improving the spirit of the disabled and dealing with mendicancy and peddling, 2) providing them with the required tools, both intellectually and manually, to exercise an occupation, 3) if there are sufficient means, setting up a workshop in which they can follow a trade, 4) establishing a social security fund that provides unemployment and sick benefits. A pamphlet distributed by the deaf club of Ghent in 1904 mentions that nine deaf clubs in Belgium had similar systems of health insurance, savings and pension funds (in Antwerp, Bruges, Brussels (3), Charleroi, Ghent, Leuven and Liège). Although these types of

associations became more common only at the end of the nineteenth century, earlier examples are available as well. One of the oldest deaf clubs in Belgium, the *Société de Secours Mutuels des Sourds-Muets de Liège* (founded in 1864) put forward the provision of financial assistance to its members as one of its main goals.<sup>119</sup>

### 4.5.3 Deafness and mendicancy

Figure 4.7 Article published in *Het Laatste Nieuws*, June 14, 1896<sup>120</sup>



Finally, I address the issue of mendicancy as a specific ‘economic activity’ of the poor. Previously I discussed how several disability scholars have associated people with disabilities in the past with begging. This statement is impossible to test in a quantitative way. However, the newspaper articles collected in the digital newspaper archive in Brussels, provide some insight in the matter. In the newspapers, I found a large number of newspaper articles about hearing beggars pretending to be deaf-mute in order to receive more alms. The joke, published in *Het Laatste Nieuws* in 1896 (figure 4.7), suggests that it was a well-established fact that many beggars pretended to be disabled. Similarly, the *Vooruit*, a socialist newspaper in Ghent, reported several arrests of bogus disabled beggars, one of which explicitly states that a man pretended to be deaf-mute and idiotic “om het medelijden op te wekken” (to stir compassion).<sup>121</sup> Similar reports crop up in several other newspapers during the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The attempts of hearing beggars to simulate deafness leads one to suspect that the legal consequences of mendicancy were less stringent for the disabled. Indeed, a closer look at the legislation on mendicancy demonstrates a milder attitude towards disabled beggars. Under Austrian rule a law was implemented in 1765 that prohibited all non-disabled poor people from begging, on penalty of flogging, branding or death. Poor and

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<sup>119</sup> *Oproep aan de doofstommen van Ghent en omliggende* (pamflet van de Vereenigde Doof-stommen van Ghent en Omtrek), ca. 1904 (archive Madosa) – cited in: Raemdonck, L. & Scheiris, I. (2007) *Ongehoord verleden*, 53.

<sup>120</sup> Translation: Among beggars – A blind person – You have definitely inherited money since you are wearing such a nice coat. A deaf-mute – this only cost me five francs. A lame person – Where? I’ll go and get one straight away.

<sup>121</sup> “Marche – Heb compassie!” in *Vooruit*, September 29, 1921.



infirm people were allowed to beg, but only in their place of residence.<sup>122</sup> Under French rule too, the disabled were spared from harsh repression. The law of 1808 distinguished between the idle vagabonds who begged out of laziness and unfortunate people who turned to begging out of necessity. The penal code of 1810 stipulated that non-disabled beggars had to be punished, while begging by “*les infirmes et incapables de gagner leur vie par le travail*” (those infirm and incapable of earning a living through work) was tolerated, or at least less punished.<sup>123</sup> The law led to the establishment of detention centres for beggars in Mons, Bruges, Hoogstraten, Ter Kameren, Namur and Rekem. These institutions were densely populated until the end of the nineteenth century in Belgium.<sup>124</sup> The laws of 1848 and 1866 reinstated the distinction between the non-disabled and disabled, as well as between adults and minors in the policy for mendicancy. The disabled and children younger than fourteen were to be treated with greater tolerance. In 1891 this resulted in the law Le Jeune, which provided for the establishment of three types of institutions: the *dépôts de mendicité* (workhouses) for the punishment of malicious beggars, the *maisons de refuge* (shelters), where disabled and sick beggars received moral and material support, and the *écoles de bienfaisance* (charity schools) intended for the education of under-aged beggars.<sup>125</sup>

Did this classification of the disabled into a separate category of more socially accepted beggars lead to a high number of deaf individuals seeking solace in mendicancy? In the digital newspaper archive, I found some newspaper reports on the arrest of beggars who were deaf-mute – although such reports were rarer than the reports on bogus deaf people. This could indicate that the deaf were unlikely to beg, or it could just reflect a lower arrest rate. We can assume that only when it came to an arrest by the police, were newspapers interested in publishing the news. As the arrest and conviction of beggars was a local affair and the costs for internment were partly at the expense of the local government, town councils were probably less inclined to arrest those begging out of misfortune as opposed to more dishonest vagabonds.

The articles mention several ways in which the local authorities dealt with the deaf beggars, depending on the characteristics of the detainee. *Le courrier de l'Escaut*, which was

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<sup>122</sup> Clement, J. (1988) *Armenzorg op het Gentse platteland: 1750-1850*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished master's dissertation), 33.

<sup>123</sup> Meuwissen, E. (1981) “Les dépôts de mendicité au tribunal de l'histoire” *Annales de la Société Belge d'Histoire des Hôpitaux*, 19, 57.

<sup>124</sup> Vercammen, R. (2014) *Leven aan de rafelrand. Landlopers en bedelaars in Belgische Rijkswelddadigheidskolonies (1870-1930)*. Brussels: Free University Brussels (unpublished PhD Dissertation), 38. Some of these provincial detention centres were abolished in the nineteenth century: Namur in 1837, Mons in 1866, Ter Kameren in 1872 and Rekem in 1890.

<sup>125</sup> Meuwissen, E. (1981) “Les dépôts de mendicité au tribunal de l'histoire”, 47-67.

mainly distributed in the region of Tournai close to the French border, reported on the arrest of several French deaf-mutes who were caught begging on Belgian soil. In all cases they were taken back to the border.<sup>126</sup> Eviction was also enforced when a deaf person was begging in a town other than their hometown. For example, a deaf-mute beggar who was arrested in the region of Tournai was sent back to his town of residence Blicquy, about 20 kilometres away.<sup>127</sup> The stipulation to return beggars to their country or village of origin was an important characteristic of early modern and nineteenth-century poverty policy.<sup>128</sup> In line with most other Western European nations at the time, Austrian rule assigned the care of the poor to the city, town or parish to which the destitute person belonged. In the course of the eighteenth century, this *localism* became more compelling. The focus on the residential poor and the exclusion of foreign beggars from local poor relief was directed at preventing any influx of wandering vagabonds and keeping the expenses of local welfare provisions under control. During the nineteenth century, regulations regarding a person's *domicile de secours* were amended in several successive laws (1797, 1818, 1845, 1876 and 1891). These laws were mainly concerned with the period a person had to reside in a municipality before they could receive support from poor relief. The severe crisis experienced in the Flemish countryside in the middle of the nineteenth century, which heightened the incidence of poverty, begging and social crime and led to an urban flight, gave rise to the adoption of a law in 1845 that imposed a waiting period of eight years. Towards the end of the century, regulations became less rigid and the qualifying period was successively reduced to five years to one year.<sup>129</sup>

If a person, deaf or pretending to be deaf, was begging in their hometown, the newspaper articles often reported that the arrested person was sent to a correctional facility. At the end of the eighteenth century, as a response to the growing number of vagrants, the central Austrian government decided to pursue a more repressive policy against vagrants and mendicancy, and saw to the establishment of workhouses in which beggars, vagrants and the unemployed could be detained and put to work. In Ghent, a workhouse opened its doors in 1772. The States of Brabant and the Principality of Liège followed Ghent's example and established a similar institution shortly afterwards. However, most

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<sup>126</sup> E.g. "Chronique locale et provinciale" in *Courier de l'Escaut*, December 23, 1897.

<sup>127</sup> "Chronique locale et provinciale" in *Courier de l'Escaut*, September 18, 1898.

<sup>128</sup> For more on settlement policies in the Southern Low Countries in the eighteenth century: Winter, A. & Lambrecht, T. (2013) "Migration, Poor Relief and Local Autonomy: Settlement Policies in England and the Southern Low Countries in the Eighteenth Century" *Past and Present*, 218, 91-126.

<sup>129</sup> Van Damme, D. (1990) "Onderstandswoonst, sedentarisering en stad-platteland-tegenstellingen. Evolutie en betekenis van de wetgeving op de onderstandswoonst in België (eind achttiende tot einde negentiende eeuw)" *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, 21, 485-520.

initiatives to establish workhouses in the Southern Netherlands were blocked by regional governments and local entrepreneurs, who feared the competition of cheaply produced goods in the institutions.<sup>130</sup> In 1808 the French government stipulated the establishment of two types of institutions for beggars: *dépôts de mendicité* for ordinary beggars (women, children, elderly persons and those that were poor because of misfortune) and *maisons de detention* for idle beggar vagabonds. However, as the *maisons* continued to exist only on paper, both types of beggars ended up together in the *dépôts*.<sup>131</sup> The result, as inspector-general Edouard Ducpétiaux stated in his 1853 report to the Ministry of Justice, was that many disabled individuals were to be found in the *dépôts* alongside elderly people, the idle and vagabonds. All received the “*même traitement, même régime, même captivité*” (same treatment, same regime, same imprisonment).<sup>132</sup> The intermingling of different sorts of beggars is also described by the British author F. T. Bircham in *An account of the administration existing in Belgium for the relief of the poor* (1870). Bircham describes how the *dépôts* initially had a threefold character: they acted as almshouses for the old and infirm, workshops for the able-bodied and correctional houses for the idle. However, the practical problems that resulted from the intermingling of these very different groups quickly led to a specialization of the *dépôts*. Moreover, beggars could enter the institution voluntarily and were at liberty to come and go to the *dépôt* as they pleased. So some would come when they needed a roof over their heads, finding temporal shelter at the expense of their hometown.<sup>133</sup> In an attempt to deal with these problems, the number of *dépôts* was downsized to five establishments: one in Bruges for the old and infirm, two in Hoogstraten and Merksplas for the able-bodied and two in Ruiselede and Beernem for under-aged boys and girls. Simultaneously, villages became less inclined to send beggars to a *dépôt* because maintaining them there was more costly than providing them with outdoor relief from the office of benevolence.<sup>134</sup> Beggars that did end up in the *dépôts* were mainly those who had been arrested by the police, like the man described in figure 4.8. The man, who pretended to be deaf-mute, was sent to the *dépôt* of Hoogstraten for two years, after being arrested yet again for begging. Similarly,

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<sup>130</sup> Lis, C. & Soly, H. (1985) *Op Vrije Voeten?*, 111; Van Damme, D. (1990) *Armenzorg en de staat. Comparatief-historische studie van de origines van de moderne verzorgingsstaat in West-Europa (voornamelijk achttiende tot begin negentiende eeuw)*. Ghent: D. Van Damme, 174-6.

<sup>131</sup> Meuwissen, E. (1981) “Les dépôts de mendicité au tribunal de l’histoire”, 56-8.

<sup>132</sup> Ducpétiaux, E. (1853) *Commission chargée de la révision de la législation organique des dépôts de mendicité. Rapport au Ministre de la Justice*. Brussels: Lesigne, 4-5.

<sup>133</sup> The law of 1845 stipulated that the villages of residence of the arrested beggars had to defray the costs of admission to a *dépôt de mendicité*. Van Damme, D. (1990) “Onderstandswoonst, sedentarisering en stad-platteland-tegenstellingen”, 504.

<sup>134</sup> Bircham, F.T. (1870) *An Account of the Administration Existing in Belgium for the Relief of the Poor and of the Reformatory Schools of Ruysselede and Beernem*. London: Knight & Company.

*L'Avenir du Luxembourg* of August 23, 1905, reported on the arrest of a deaf-mute boy aged around 10, who was caught begging in the town of Andenne (Namur). He was sent to an *école de bien-faisance* (charity school).<sup>135</sup> Another account (figure 4.9) illustrates the occasional different approach to disabled beggars. *Het Laatste Nieuws* reported on an “unfortunate” man, aged between 23 and 30, who was caught begging. The man’s legs were physically impaired and he was deaf-mute. He was taken to the lunatic asylum at Evere.

**Figure 4.8** Article published in *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, October 10, 1899<sup>136</sup>

Een vagabond, op heeterdaad van bedelarij betrapt, werd zaterdag avond door een politieagent van Schaarbeek aangehouden. De kerel die een plaatje droeg met het woord : « Doofstom », werd naar het kommissariaat geleid. De officier van dienst wou trouwden aangehoudene en zegde tot een der agenten : « Ik geloof dat wij met een oudveroordeelde te doen hebben ». « Het is niet waar, riep de vagabond, ik ben doofstom ! » De valsche doofstomme, die reeds veertien veroordeelingen voor diefstal ondergaan heeft, werd zondag voor twee jaar naar Hoogstraten gezonden.

**Figure 4.9** Article published in *Het Laatste Nieuws*, May 8, 1895<sup>137</sup>

— Een ongelukkige. — Maandag hield de politie alhier een jongeling aan schijnende tusschen de 23 en de 30 jaar oud, op heeterdaad van bedelarij betrapt. De ongelukkige is gebrekkelijk aan de beenen doofstom en kon op geene enkele wijze zijne identiteit den bestatigen. Deze ongelukkige werd voorloopig naar het gesticht van Evere gebracht.

<sup>135</sup> “Mysterieux sourd-muet” in *L'Avenir du Luxembourg*, August 23, 1905.

<sup>136</sup> Translation: A vagabond, caught in the act of mendicancy, was arrested on Saturday evening by a police officer from Schaarbeek. The man, who was wearing a sign with the word “deaf-mute”, was taken to the commissioner’s office. The duty officer did not trust the arrested man and said to one of the police officers: “I believe we are dealing with an ex-convict.” “That is not true,” the vagabond shouted, “I am deaf-mute!” The deaf-mute impostor, who had already been convicted 14 times for theft, was sent to Hoogstraten on Sunday for a period of two years.

<sup>137</sup> Translation: An unfortunate man – On Monday the police arrested a young man appearing to be between 23 and 30 years old, caught in the act of begging. The unfortunate man had incapacitated legs, was a deaf-mute and could not identify himself in any way. The unfortunate man has been taken to the asylum of Evere for the time being.

## 4.6 Conclusion

In the introduction of this chapter, I discussed the historical materialist belief in an economic integration of disabled people in the pre-industrial economy. This view has been expressed by many historical studies into disability, often followed by the assertion of an increasing inequity parallel with industrialization processes. In this chapter, I have put this hypothesis to the test by examining the employment characteristics of the deaf. This assumption of economic (dis)integration does not directly address the relationship between education and poverty and employment. In the final sections of this chapter, however, I have stated how the analysis of the opportunities of schooling and of the experience of poverty and mendicancy can contribute to an understanding of employment that extends beyond the economic one. The excursions based on more qualitative sources served this goal as well.

Based on the analyses in this chapter, I conclude that the occupational profile of the deaf showed some resemblance to general employment characteristics in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but also differed in several ways. Firstly, unemployment rates were always higher in the deaf cohorts, especially among women and in the cities. However, this does not necessarily imply that deaf people were unfit to participate in the labour market as a result of their disability. The higher incidence of unemployment may also have been an indirect result of their impairment. Tables 4.7 and 4.8 uncovered a relationship between unemployment and a person's living arrangements that was different for both research groups. While hearing sisters were mostly registered unemployed when living in matrimony with their husbands, deaf men and women were more often institutionalized or living in with their parents or a sibling. The deaf may have had to live in an institution or stay in the parental household as a result of the impossibility of finding employment. However, their unemployment could also have been the result of their institutionalization or living in – as they were provided for, there was no need for them to find employment outside the home.<sup>138</sup> Moreover, throughout the analysis, I have suggested that being registered as without occupation does not necessarily imply that the deaf lived passive lives. Given the ever-present work on farms or in running a household, it is not unlikely that deaf individuals were somehow involved in the family business. These types of unpaid labour were just not considered as economic activity and therefore often not registered.

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<sup>138</sup> Chapter 6 will elaborate more on the living arrangements of the research population and the ways in which residential situation affected the registration of employment.

A second important difference is the representation of the deaf in occupations in trade and transport and the administration sector. In the countryside in particular, employment in these sectors became increasingly important for the hearing siblings in the course of the nineteenth century. Most likely the low representation of the deaf in these occupations is the result of the importance of communication skills in the practice of an occupation such as teacher, shopkeeper or clerk.

A striking third difference is the development of unskilled labour in the deaf cohort, as the number of unskilled deaf labourers showed the opposite trend to unskilled labourers in the general population: it was dominant in the first research cohort, but lost importance in the course of the nineteenth century. Instead, the deaf became increasingly employed in the garment trade, a sector that was less popular among the siblings. As such, the deaf traded a highly insecure occupation such as a labourer for a more prestigious one as a clothing artisan. In section 4.4, I connected the changeover to higher valued occupations to the development of deaf schools, which aimed to provide deaf students with good prospects for employment. However, the schools were not always that successful as evidenced by the high incidence of unemployment among the graduates. Nonetheless, newspaper articles showed that the public had a high opinion of the training in deaf schools – although a patronizing undertone about the misery of these unfortunates was never far off. A comparison with the total deaf population of East Flanders in 1858 and with the employment pattern of people with other types of disability showed that this employment pattern was characteristic for the deaf, specifically and in general. The analysis of employment in relation to the state of indigence suggested, however, that this account may be too simplistic. Although tailors, shoemakers and seamstresses were generally less prone to poverty, I found that of the deaf people receiving poor relief one fifth worked as clothing artisans, which could have been a sign of lower remuneration and appreciation of disabled craftsmen.

Based on this chapter on employment, I conclude that the lives of the deaf were not necessarily better before industrialization: unemployment was already high and a large group of people were employed in the insecure and cheap unskilled labour sector. Unemployment and poverty rates rose during the nineteenth century, but this is consistent with a general increase and not necessarily unique to the deaf. Moreover, the deaf who were employed increasingly found more skilled and steadier employment in the domestic service sector and garment trade, parallel with the expanding deaf educational system.



## 5 Marriage and family life

### 5.1 Introduction

**Figure 5.1** Article published in *De Werkman*, March 18, 1892<sup>1</sup>

— Te  
Gent is weér een huwelijk geweest van doofstommen : M. August De Naeghel van Maldegem, sedert 26 j. in 't Gesticht der Doofstommen, als Meestergast der Schoenmakers, met Jufvr. Marie Van de Vondel, witgoednaaister op Ottergemschen steenweg. De Plechtigheden op Stadhuis, zooals in de Kerk, geschieden door tusschenkomst van Broeder Aloisius, onderwijzer in het Gesticht der Doofstommen.

On February 2, 1892 the 38-year-old deaf shoemaker August De Naeghel married the 30-year-old deaf seamstress Marie Van de Vondel in the city of Ghent. *De Werkman*, a regional newspaper of Aalst, reported on their marriage on March 18. Except for three articles about a 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, this wedding is the only one reported in the newspaper in 1892. Apparently a marriage between a deaf-mute man and woman was extraordinary enough to merit an article. However, the article states that “another” marriage of deaf-mutes was celebrated, suggesting that a marriage between a deaf man and woman was not unheard of. Was the marriage worth reporting because a marriage between two deaf individuals was rare, or just because it was considered curious that both partners were deaf? Getting married was an integral part of everyday life in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe. However, to what extent was this the case for

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<sup>1</sup> Translation: In Ghent there has been another marriage of deaf-mutes: M. August De Naeghel of Maldegem, since 26 years in the asylum of the deaf-mutes as a master shoemaker, with Miss Marie Van de Vondel, seamstress of white fabrics in the Ottergemschen Steenweg. The ceremonies at the city hall, and in the church, were mediated by Brother Aloisius, teacher in the asylum for the deaf-mute.



people born deaf? This chapter focuses on the marriage opportunities and fertility behaviour of the deaf.

Several scholars have studied the marriage opportunities of disabled men and women in present-day societies. In their research into the lives of women with disabilities, psychology professors Michelle Fine and Adrienne Asch describe how the opportunities of women with disabilities “*to be nurtured and to nurture, to be lovers and be loved, to be mothers if they desire*” are severely constrained.<sup>2</sup> Paula A. Franklin too has reported that disabled persons are more likely to marry later and more likely to be divorced.<sup>3</sup> Schur, Kruse and Blanck in their research into the economic, political and social inclusion of people with disabilities discuss how the higher likelihood of living alone among people with disabilities reflects their lower chances of being married.<sup>4</sup> So far, there have been no comparable studies into the marriage opportunities of disabled men and women in the past.

Historical materialist theory argues that disabled people led increasingly segregated lives in the course of the nineteenth century. Although the theory does not make explicit statements about the marriage prospects of the disabled, the segregation hypothesis can easily be translated to the context of marriage. The social segregation of the deaf may find an expression in the increasing difficulties of deaf men and women in making contact with potential hearing spouses, which could lead to a lower number of deaf people marrying, an increase in the average age at marriage and a higher likelihood of downward social mobility through marriage. Cultural disability historians, on the other hand, believe that the segregation of people with similar disabilities for treatment and services enabled the development of group identities and opened up possibilities for disabled people to meet each other.<sup>5</sup> Several late nineteenth-century newspaper articles confirm that deaf people in Belgium gathered at congresses, balls, schools and sports events.<sup>6</sup> These venues may have acted as places where deaf men and women made contacts which led to romantic relationships. So the increased segregation may also have resulted in a growing number of deaf men and women marrying each other, in so-called *intermarriages*.

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<sup>2</sup> Fine, M. & Asch, A. (1992) “Beyond Pedestals: Revisiting the Lives of Women with Disabilities” In: Fine, M. (ed.) *Disruptive Voices: The Possibilities of Feminist Research*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 151.

<sup>3</sup> Franklin, P.A. (1977) “Impact of Disability on the Family Structure” *Social Security Bulletin*, 40/5, 18.

<sup>4</sup> Schur L., Kruse, D. & Blanck, P.D. (2013) *People with Disabilities: Sidelined or Mainstreamed?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 128.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Quartararo, A.T. (2008) *Deaf Identity and Social Images in Nineteenth-Century France*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press.

<sup>6</sup> For examples of these newspaper articles, see 6.3.2 in Chapter 6.

I start this chapter by discussing some general nineteenth-century perceptions about disability, deafness and marriage. As section 5.2 will show, the question as to whether deaf people should be allowed to marry was much debated in nineteenth-century North America and Europe. The development of the pseudo-scientific field of eugenics, in particular, altered perceptions about disabled persons and gave rise to shocking new methods to control people who were socially, intellectually or physically different.

Subsequently, I investigate how general attitudes to deaf marriages found expression in the actual marriage opportunities of deaf people. To this end, I address three main research questions in section 5.3. First, did deaf people marry less than their hearing siblings and how did intersectional characteristics such as gender, birth year, socio-economic status and environment affect marriage opportunities? Second, did deaf men and women marry later than their hearing siblings? And third, whom did the deaf marry and do spouse characteristics point to a more vulnerable position on the marriage market? As marriage was often inextricably linked to intergenerational transmission of wealth, choosing a marriage partner was a crucial issue in which love was not the primary consideration. In higher class families especially, marriage strategies were closely tied to more general family strategies regarding social reproduction. Despite differences across social groups, nineteenth-century communities were generally characterized by strongly homogenous first marriages, implying high uniformity in age, geographical origin and socio-economic status among the couples.<sup>7</sup> Greater diversity in the deaf couples may therefore point to less equal marriages and a weaker bargaining position of deaf men and women on the marriage market.

The second part of this chapter (section 5.4) is devoted to the fertility behaviour of the 239 married subjects and the 25 single mothers. In Belgium fertility rates clearly declined from the 1880s onwards, in rural Flanders from the 1900s.<sup>8</sup> A consensus exists that this decline was the result of conscious birth control. Based on personal testimonies and sources documenting the sale of condoms, Christa Matthys has shown that at the beginning of the twentieth century many couples in Flanders used some form of contraception.<sup>9</sup> The most recent publications regarding fertility control and the fertility decline point to both *structural* and *diffusive* elements to explain (changes in) reproductive behaviour. Place of origin and socio-economic class can be considered structural factors.

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<sup>7</sup> Van Leeuwen, M.H.D. (ed.) (2006) *Marriage Choices and Class Boundaries: Social Endogamy in History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>8</sup> For more on the fertility decline: Devos, I. (2006) *Allemaal beestjes. Mortaliteit en morbiditeit in Vlaanderen, 18de-20ste eeuw*. Ghent: Academia Press, 11-26; Lesthaeghe, R.J. (1977) *The Decline of Belgian Fertility 1800-1970*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 3-14; Matthys, C. (2012) *Sex and the City: Female Domestic Servants and the Diffusion of Fertility Control in Flanders*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished PhD dissertation), 190.

<sup>9</sup> Matthys, C. (2012) *Sex and the City*, 130.

These factors determine, among other things, whether the use of contraception was considered advantageous and whether means of birth control were accessible. Diffusion refers to the transmission of ideas and behaviour related to reproduction through networks of social interaction. These networks can operate on a national scale, in socio-political discourses and mass media, and between individuals, in personal social relationships.<sup>10</sup> Starting from the premise that couples tried to control their family size, it would be worth examining whether the fertility behaviour of the deaf differed from the hearing siblings. Since the deaf and hearing research subjects grew up in same environments, the influence of structural factors was probably less pronounced. However, deaf and hearing people may have encountered different diffusive elements. For example, a negative societal attitude to people with disabilities having children may have translated itself into deaf couples being reluctant to raise a large family. Lower fertility may also have been the result of improvements in the methods and opportunities for the deaf to communicate. The establishment of deaf schools generated a strong sense of mutual solidarity among deaf students, which quickly led to the formation of deaf clubs and associations. Besides their importance for the maintenance of social contacts between the deaf, these clubs were an important medium for education and knowledge transfer.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps with regard to reproductive behaviour as well.

The downside is that, as the research individuals were born in 1860 at the latest, almost all their children in the dataset were born well before 1900 – when the fertility decline had only just begun.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, several scholars, including Gosta Carlsson and Chris Vandenbroeke, believe that even before this decline people were trying to control their family sizes by contraceptive methods such as withdrawal, abstinence and prolonging the lactation period.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, some scholars have provided evidence that fertility was to some extent being regulated during the whole of the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, the number of deaf parents in this study is too small to accurately test whether (and in that case, why) deaf parents exhibited a different reproductive be-

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<sup>10</sup> Matthys, C. (2012) *Sex and the City*, 24-32.

<sup>11</sup> Raemdonck, L. & Scheiris, I. (2007) *Ongehoord verleden. Dove frontvorming in België aan het begin van de 20ste eeuw*. Ghent: Fevlado-diversus vzw, 53.

<sup>12</sup> The last child of a research subject was born on December 6, 1910. Only 2.3 percent of all children (N=1178 children) were born in the twentieth century.

<sup>13</sup> Matthys, C. (2012) *Sex and the City*, 23; Carlsson, G. (1966) “The Decline of Fertility. Innovation or Adjustment Process?” *Population Studies*, 20/2, 149-74; Vandenbroeke, C. (1986) *Vrijen en trouwen van de middeleeuwen tot heden. Seks, liefde en huwelijk in historisch perspectief*. Brussels/Amsterdam: Elsevier.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. Van Bavel, J. and Kok, J. (2004) “Birth Spacing in the Netherlands. The Effects of Family Composition, Occupation and Religion on Birth Intervals, 1820-1885” *European Journal of Population*, 20/2, 119-140; Bengtsson, T. and Dribe, M. (2006) “Deliberate Control in a Natural Fertility Population: Southern Sweden, 1766-1864” *Demography*, 43/4, 727-46.

haviour. Nonetheless, even a more descriptive analysis of aspects such as the timing and frequency of childbirth, and the incidence of disabilities among the children of deaf persons, can contribute to a better understanding of the experiences of deaf people in the past.

## 5.2 To marry or not to marry: nineteenth-century perceptions about disability and marriage

Aside from the general economic constraints on the marriage market I described in 2.3.3, the question arises as to whether disabled individuals faced more barriers in their pursuit of marriage. As disability has to be considered “*primarily a social rather than a physical problem*”<sup>15</sup>, barriers should be sought mainly *outside* the disabled individual. The persistence of prejudice and discrimination as well as prohibitive legislative decisions could negatively influence the marriage opportunities of people with disabilities.

From an economic perspective, disability scholars perceive nineteenth-century industrialization processes as particularly excluding disabled people. People with disabilities were unable to keep pace with the new factory-based work systems and, therefore, threatened to expose flaws in “*a system that celebrated values of independence and utility while providing little or no place for those who had legitimate reasons for not fitting in*”.<sup>16</sup> From the nineteenth century onwards, the great majority of disabled people are therefore assumed to have had no occupation or source of income. In the previous chapter I confirmed the high rates of unemployment among deaf individuals, which increased steadily over the course of the nineteenth century. Individuals with uncertain resources can be assumed to be less attractive partners and therefore less successful on the marriage market. This is especially true for men, who were expected to be the main breadwinner in the family.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Longmore, P.K. (2003) *Why I Burned My Book and Other Essays on Disability*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1.

<sup>16</sup> Finkelstein, V. (1981) “Disability and the Helper/Helped Relationship. An Historical View” In: Liddiard, P., Brechin, A. & Swain, J. (eds.) *Handicap in a Social World: A Reader*. Sevenoaks: Hodder and Stoughton, 3; Kudlick, C. (2008) “Modernity's Miss-Fits. Blind Girls and Marriage in France and America, 1820-1920” In: Bell, R.M. & Yans, V. (eds.) *Women on Their Own: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Being Single*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 212.

<sup>17</sup> For more on the male breadwinner ideal: Janssens, A. (1998) “The Rise and Decline of the Male Breadwinner Family? An Overview of the Debate” In: Janssens, A. (ed.) *The Rise and Decline of the Male Breadwinner Family*.

Nineteenth-century ideological and cultural developments also potentially affected the marriage prospects of people with disabilities. There was an overwhelming sense of progress and optimism in nineteenth-century western Europe and United States and many people seemed eager to control their destiny both at the macro and micro level. The idea of universal fitness gained ground. To achieve this ideal people turned their attention to the responsibility of having a healthy family, starting with a healthy man and wife. Accordingly, private matters such as sexuality, marriage and child-rearing became subject to public control and regulation. This resulted in all kinds of debates on marriage and disability, not least the question of who should and should not marry and why. Until disability rights came of age in the late twentieth-century, nearly everyone shared the belief that those with disabilities should not marry.<sup>18</sup>

The increasing control on family life was paralleled by shifting cultural assumptions about the role of women. The nineteenth century saw the emergence of a patriarchal society, which progressively “*confined woman to the home, valorized her maternal functions, and cherished her beauty*”. As a result, disabilities that disfigured women imposed a negative attitude on disabled women “*by associating female disability with diseased female sexuality and suspect morality*”. Paralleled by the fact that medical and religious assumptions connected a healthy body with a healthy soul, women with disabilities were further distanced. Women considered incapable of looking after the home and bearing children faced pity, mistrust and resentment. Cultural attitudes to women underwent extensive revision, especially regarding the female body. Medical men began to focus almost obsessively on the female body as an explanation for women’s nature, and a large number of medical texts valorized the health and reproductive capacities of women. This led to the disabled body being increasingly interpreted as a sign of either sexlessness or sexual deviance.<sup>19</sup> A disabled woman displayed less than the norm or the fantasized ideal of bodily integrity and was therefore considered less sensitive, exciting, sexually warm and responsive, and less likely to be successful in her professional life, to have a successful marriage, and live a happy and fulfilling life.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, disabled women who had partners, especially if they were non-disabled men, were more likely to be subject to curiosity, scrutiny, and public misunderstanding. Perceived as a social burden, the dis-

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Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1-24; Vanhaute, E. (1998) “Het kostwinnersmodel als historische fictie. Arbeid en inkomen van gezinnen in langetermijnperspectief” In: Van Dongen, W., Vanhaute, E. & Pauwels, K. (eds.) *Het kostwinnersmodel voorbij? Naar een nieuw basismodel voor arbeidsverdeling binnen de gezinnen*. Leuven/Brussels: Garant, 55-70.

<sup>18</sup> Kudlick, C. (2008) “Modernity's Miss-Fits”, 208.

<sup>19</sup> LaCom, C. (1997) “‘It Is More Than Lame’: Female Disability, Sexuality, and the Maternal in the Nineteenth-Century Novel” In: Snyder, S.L. & Mitchell, D.T. (eds.) *The Body and Physical Difference. Discourses of Disability*. Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 190-1.

<sup>20</sup> Berscheid, E. & Walster, E. (1972) “Beauty and the Beast” *Psychology Today*, 42-46, 74.

abled woman evoked pity that spread to her partner. Men rejected disabled women as workers and partners because they failed to meet expectations regarding appearance or were perceived as being incapable of providing physical and emotional care.<sup>21</sup>

The nineteenth century was also characterized by a fascination for evolution, as scientists attempted to explain biological differences through natural laws rather than the work of God. Geology, archaeology and biology combined to find out why the past was increasingly populated by less progressive forms of animals and humans. However, the theories were soon used not only to explain the supremacy of contemporary humanity over past forms, but also of certain contemporary humans over other contemporaries.<sup>22</sup> It was this pseudo-scientific field of *eugenics* that, translated into public policy, altered perceptions about disabled persons and even gave rise to methods of limiting their numbers and new ways of segregating them. Eugenics essentially aimed at “*the eradication or suppression of tainted or inferior human stock*”, an ambition that resulted in staggering new methods to control people who were socially, intellectually or physically different.<sup>23</sup> Those classified as physically, mentally, behaviourally or sensorily abnormal were evaluated in evolutionary terms. The sign languages of deaf people were no longer assessed as the basis for a potential “*perfect universal language*” but were equated with the sign languages of savages and compared to the early evolution of language.<sup>24</sup> Because of their ‘otherness’, deaf people were viewed as “*alien, unfamiliar, incomprehensible, and of low intelligence*”.<sup>25</sup>

As a result, “To marry or not to marry?” became a threatening question for deaf people in the late nineteenth century. Parallel with the development of a blossoming deaf culture, some educators became increasingly concerned that the number of deaf people was growing as a result of their segregation and inclination towards intermarriage with other deaf people.<sup>26</sup> In 1883 the American inventor Alexander Graham Bell presented his paper *Memoir upon the Formation of a Deaf Variety of the Human Race* to the American Academy of Science. To Bell, Deaf culture posed a major social threat. He was especially concerned about marriage. According to Bell, “*if the laws of heredity that are known to hold in the case of animals also apply to man, the intermarriage of the congenital deaf-mutes through a*

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<sup>21</sup> Fine, M. & Asch, A. (1992) “Beyond Pedestals”, 18-9.

<sup>22</sup> Branson, J. & Miller, D. (2002) *Damned for Their Difference: The Cultural Construction of Deaf People as Disabled: A Sociological History*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 26.

<sup>23</sup> Winzer, M.A. (1993) *The History of Special Education: From Isolation to Integration*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 282-3.

<sup>24</sup> Branson, J. & Miller, D. (2002) *Damned for Their Difference*, 150.

<sup>25</sup> Burch, S. (2002) *Signs of Resistance. American Deaf Cultural History, 1900 to World War II*. New York/London: New York University Press, 136.

<sup>26</sup> Burch, S. (2002) *Signs of Resistance*, 139.

number of successive generations should result in the formation of a deaf variety of the human race".<sup>27</sup> Although ultimately none of the laws advocated by Bell were implemented, his writings encouraged people to draw links between marriage customs and a healthy population. The fear of degeneration and the discourse on eugenics in the wake of Galton's theories on the subject also spread to the European continent. In Europe, however, the eugenics movement distanced itself from the more radical measures put forward by American eugenicists. The Belgian eugenics movement can best be described as a social hygiene movement, which sought solutions more through education and moralizing than coercion.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, newspaper articles suggest that attitudes to deaf intermarriages were more moderate in Belgium. Several newspaper articles, some dating as early as the 1860s, discuss the desirability and consequences of deaf marriages. For example, on the occasion of a marriage between two deaf-mutes in Liège in October 1868, *L'Echo du Parlement* raised the question of whether deaf intermarriages should not be forbidden as many believed that "qu'elles ne peuvent avoir pour fruits que des êtres incomplets comme les parents qui les procréent." (they can only have offspring who are as incomplete as the parents who procreate them).<sup>29</sup> However, the author of the article countered this argument by emphasizing that "mutism" was not hereditary and he argued that deaf marriages were usually happy. Although this article suggests that general attitudes to marriages of the deaf were not necessarily negative, the very fact that the matter of intermarriages was raised illustrates that deaf marriages and the heredity of deafness were debated in Belgian society. An article published in February 1940 in *Onze Vriend*, a journal written by and for deaf people, shows that deaf people were not unaware that their reproductive behaviour was (still) the topic of discussion. The author raised the matter that, while the issue of whether "children are always a blessing" is never asked for healthy children, it is most pertinent in the case of deaf-mute children. She continues by arguing that deaf children too are a blessing as they have an immortal soul and can be as intelligent as hearing children. And even if they were not intelligent, they were still a blessing as "they provide other people with the opportunity to be charitable and earn their spot in heaven".<sup>30</sup> It is interesting to note that the author invokes the argument that deaf children are valuable as they can act as recipients of charity and compassion. Other testimonies illustrate the attempts made by the deaf schools to prevent deaf girls

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<sup>27</sup> Quoted by: Burch, S. (2002) *Signs of Resistance*, 139. An important opponent of A.G. Bell was Philip G. Gillett, superintendent of the Illinois school for the deaf. E.g. Gillett, P.G. (1891) "Deaf-Mutes: Their Intermarriage and Offspring" *Science*, 17/417, 56-60.

<sup>28</sup> Tollebeek, J., Vanpaemel, G. & Wils, K. (eds.) (2003) *Degeneratie in België. 1860-1940. Een geschiedenis van ideeën en praktijken*. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 107.

<sup>29</sup> "Mariage de deux sourds-muets" in *L'Echo du Parlement*, October 25, 1868.

<sup>30</sup> Laura (1940) "Voor onze hoorende Vrienden. Zijn kinderen altijd een zegen?" *Onze Vriend*, 16/2.

and boys from coming into contact with each other. Simone Placet, born in 1928, attended the Royal Institute for Deaf Girls in Brussels from 1937 to 1947. In an interview with Maurice Buyens, she describes how the girls in the institute were not allowed to meet deaf boys, not even talk about them as it was considered “a sin”. Likewise, Jenny Claeys, who attended the Institute for the Deaf and Blind in Bruges from 1947 to 1959, stated that girls and boys were strictly separated. They were not allowed to talk or they would be punished. She said that “having contact was a mortal sin”. On a similar account, ex-students attest how they were discouraged by their teachers to join a deaf society to avoid coming exclusively into contact with other deaf persons.<sup>31</sup>

**Figure 5.2** Part of the article “Zijn kinderen altijd een zegen?” (are children always a blessing?)



Source: *Onze Vriend*, 16/2 (1940).

The trends described in this section suggest that it became increasingly difficult for deaf men and women to marry in the course of the nineteenth century. In the following section, I examine the marriage opportunities of the deaf research population. Did a growing number of deaf people remain unmarried in the course of the nineteenth century? And what were the marriage chances of deaf people in the century before?

<sup>31</sup> Buyens, M. (2005) *De dove persoon, zijn gebarentaal en het dovenonderwijs*. Antwerp: Garant, 177 & 263.



## 5.3 Marriage behaviour of the deaf

### 5.3.1 Marriage opportunities in numbers: frequencies and means

The starting point of the analysis is the assumption that the marriage chances of the deaf deteriorated in the course of the nineteenth century. A deterioration can manifest itself in a decreasing number of deaf individuals who married (frequency), an increase in the average age at marriage and a growing number of deaf individuals who married an ‘unequal’ partner with regard to age, social class and geographical origin. These three aspects of marriage life are the focal point in this section.<sup>32</sup>

The number of individuals included in these three types of analysis obviously varies. While the analysis of the marriage frequency is based on the total research population of 568 individuals, the age at marriage and spouse characteristics can only be examined for the 48 deaf and 191 hearing individuals who actually entered marriage.

#### 5.3.1.1 Marriage frequency

Table 5.1 shows the marriage frequency per birth cohort and gender for the deaf and sibling populations.

**Table 5.1** Percentage that married according to cohort and gender, in %

	Birth cohort 1			Birth cohort 2		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Deaf	29.4	3.7	19.4	16.5	12.1	14.5
Siblings	65.3	82	72.7	55.3	69.6	62.1
<i>Total</i>	46.6	45.2	46	35.5	41.5	38.3

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Notes: for birth cohort 1, N= 85 deaf men, 54 deaf women, 78 brothers, 61 sisters. For birth cohort 2, N= 79 deaf men, 66 deaf women, 76 brothers, 69 sisters.

Of the deaf men and women born in the first birth cohort, about 19 percent entered marriage. This average conceals a big gender difference: while about one in three deaf men married, only 4 percent of the women did. The chances of deaf women being successful on the marriage market appear to have been extremely low. The marriage rates

<sup>32</sup> The age at marriage and the marriage homogamy between the spouses are analyzed for first marriages only. Remarriages are discussed later on. All information for the analysis could be found in the *marriage* subfile of the *research individual file* (see 2.2.1.1).

of the siblings, on the other hand, fluctuate between 65 and 82 percent and women were more likely to get married. So the difference in marriage rates according to gender was largest between the deaf and hearing women. For women, more than for men, deafness appears to have been an impediment to marriage. Or put differently, while female spouses could more easily overcome the deafness of their husbands, male spouses were less willing to settle down with a deaf woman. This finding suggests that deaf women, more than deaf men, were associated with sexlessness and the inability to be a partner and parent.

In the course of the nineteenth century, in line with general developments, marriage rates declined in both the total deaf and sibling populations.<sup>33</sup> Of the deaf individuals born around the middle of the nineteenth century, only one in seven got married, compared to about 62 percent of the siblings. However, if I make a distinction according to gender, we observe an opposite development among the deaf. While marriage rates in the male deaf cohort almost halved, female marriage rates went up. The reason for this unexpected increase is difficult to trace. Perhaps the spread of deaf education in the course of the nineteenth century – and consequently the spread of the idea that deaf persons were not ‘dumb’, paralleled with an increase in the number of educated deaf women who were able to communicate more easily – made women more eligible marriage partners. However, the marriage prospects of deaf men did not benefit from these educational developments. The high unemployment rates of deaf men in the nineteenth century may have cancelled out the positive effect of schooling. Despite the increase in the female deaf marriage rates, deaf women still had worse marriage prospects compared to deaf men and hearing siblings.

In sum, table 5.1 shows that marriage was not the obvious path in life for the majority of the deaf. The low marriage rates strongly suggest that the presence of an auditory disability negatively affected a person’s marriage opportunities. However, the assumption that marriage rates deteriorated in the nineteenth century for the deaf in particular is not confirmed. Marriage rates were already very low in the eighteenth century, and more deaf women married in the nineteenth century. Deaf men did experience more difficulties on the nineteenth-century marriage market, but this seems to be related to a general pattern.

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<sup>33</sup> In Chapter 2 (2.3.3) I discussed the restrictive marriage pattern that characterized eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Flanders. Parallel with socio-economic changes, the number of permanent singles reached a climax around the middle of the nineteenth century, with about 25 percent of the population remaining single permanently. This general decline probably explains the lower number of marriages in the second birth cohort.

A comparison of the results of the research population with ratios from the 1858 census (published in the *Exposé de la situation du Royaume, 1851-1860*) enables to assess the representativeness of my findings. The *Exposé* reports separate marriage rates for deaf individuals living in each province, either outside or inside an institution. Of those living outside an institution, respectively 98 percent and 95 percent of the East-Flemish deaf women and men were unmarried. Comparable low marriage rates were recorded for the deaf living in the other Flemish provinces.<sup>34</sup> This suggests that the marriage rates within the deaf research population are above average compared to the general deaf population. However, important to note is that the 1858 census calculates marriage rates based on the total (non-institutionalized) deaf population, thus including children as well. A calculation of the marriage rates among the deaf at marriageable age might therefore yield higher marriage percentages. Of the 425 deaf men and women living in an institution at the time of the census, only one woman was recorded a widow. The other 424 persons were all unmarried. Yet, as deaf schools were considered a type of institution too many of the unmarried subjects probably were children and thus unable to marry. Despite the difficulties to compare my findings with provincial statistics, the ratios in both sources convincingly show that the majority of the deaf was permanently single, both in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

The 1858 census shows that marriage rates differed slightly between the Flemish provinces (see footnote 34), suggesting that deaf people's marriage prospects may have been influenced by their living environment. So it would be interesting to investigate differences in the marriage rates according to whether they lived in urban/rural municipalities, the type of district and the level of industrialization found there.

Table 5.2 presents the percentage of people who married according to whether they were born in a rural or urban municipality.<sup>35</sup> For example, in the first birth cohort 19.2 percent of the deaf born in a city entered marriage, compared to 19.5 percent of the rural inhabitants.

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<sup>34</sup> Antwerp: 100 percent of the urban and rural deaf men and women were unmarried. Brabant: 86 percent of the urban deaf women and 93 percent of the urban deaf men was unmarried, 93 percent of the rural deaf women and 95 percent of the rural deaf men. West-Flanders: 84 percent of the urban deaf women and 93 percent of the urban deaf men, all rural deaf women and 98 percent of the rural deaf men were unmarried. Limburg: all urban deaf men and women were unmarried, 96 percent of the rural deaf women and 98 percent of the rural deaf men was unmarried. (*Exposé de la situation du Royaume (1851-1860)*)

<sup>35</sup> The distinction between urban and rural is based on the birthplaces of the research individuals. However, in most cases being born in the city also implied that a person spent most of their life in the city. Similarly, most rural inhabitants remained in the countryside. In Chapter 6, I discuss the migration behaviour of the research population.

**Table 5.2** Percentage experiencing marriage according to cohort and environment, in %

	Birth cohort 1		Birth cohort 2	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Deaf	19.2	19.5	22.6	9.8
Siblings	76.9	71.7	64.2	60.9
<i>Total</i>	48.1	45.6	43.4	35.3

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Notes: for birth cohort 1, N= 26 urban deaf, 113 rural deaf, 26 urban siblings, 113 rural siblings. For birth cohort 2, N= 53 urban deaf, 92 rural deaf, 53 urban siblings, 92 rural siblings.

Comparing the marriage rates of the urban and rural dwellers in the first birth cohort shows that differences in the deaf and the hearing group were rather limited. About 19 percent of the deaf in the cities and countryside married. For the siblings the figure was over 70 percent for both settings. In the second birth cohort, differences between the two living environments increased, in favour of the cities. In the sibling population, city dwellers had only a limited advantage compared to the rural inhabitants. However, living in the city contributed greatly to the marriage prospects of the deaf. How can we explain the much higher marriage rates among the urban deaf? A possible explanation is that a larger number of deaf individuals lived in the city. The higher marriage rates there may then be the result of people in cities being more accustomed to human variance. In an urban population, characterized by a varied population of natives, migrants and foreigners, it may have been easier for deaf people to blend in and be accepted. Moreover, spread over only eleven cities in East Flanders, opportunities for deaf people to meet each other were probably greater in the cities.

Indeed, the available data suggests that more deaf individuals in the nineteenth century lived in urban settings. In his research into two generations (1807-1809 and 1846) of East Flemish disabled men taken from the conscription registers, Tom De Paepe also plotted the living situation of the men at the time of registration for conscription. He found that in the beginning of the nineteenth century (1807-1809), about 23 percent of the disabled East Flemish conscripts lived in an urban town. This rate was consistent with the general urbanization rate in the province at the time (22.4 percent). However, in the middle of the nineteenth century (1846) 32 percent of the disabled conscripts lived in one of the eleven East Flemish cities, as opposed to a general urbanization rate of 26.4 percent.<sup>36</sup> In other words, the disabled men were more likely to live in the city

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<sup>36</sup> De Paepe does not indicate over how many rural villages the remaining 68 percent of the disabled conscripts were spread. Undoubtedly, the number of rural birthplaces was exceedingly higher (as a point of reference: in the research population of this research project, deaf individuals originate from 11 cities and 114 rural villages). De Paepe, T. (2003) *Oost-Vlaamse mannen met een handicap in de 19de eeuw. Een sociaal-demografisch onderzoek op basis van de conscriptieregisters*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished master's thesis).

than the average population. The preference for urban life was also confirmed by the census of 1858. Based on the census data, I have estimated that in Belgium in 1858, 1 in 1167 urban inhabitants was deaf, compared to 1 in 3150 rural inhabitants.<sup>37</sup> These ratios indicate that the cities had a higher concentration of disabled and deaf men and women than rural villages.

There are various possible explanations for the higher representation of disabled persons in cities. On the one hand, it may have been the result of a wider range of special schools and non-educational institutions in urban areas. Indeed, deaf schools and clubs were principally located in cities. These institutions probably attracted many deaf people to the city and may have acted as important meeting places for future spouses. On the other hand, the higher urban representation may also be related to a higher likelihood of injury in an urban working environment.<sup>38</sup> The bad working conditions and health situation of the linen workers in mid-nineteenth-century Ghent was criticized by, among others, physicians J. Mareska and J. Heyman.<sup>39</sup> They describe the frequency with which workers became physically impaired as a result of work accidents. Although deaf-muteness can hardly be considered a work accident, a higher representation of people with different types of disabilities in the cities may have led to a higher tolerance of deaf-mute people as well.

Geographical differences also become apparent when looking at marriage rates for the various districts. Table 5.3 shows the percentage of married individuals in each district according to birth cohort (see figure 2.17 for a map showing the six districts in East Flanders.)

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<sup>37</sup> The figure is calculated by dividing the total urban/rural population by the number of deaf individuals in the cities/rural villages. The number of institutionalized deaf was recorded separately from the distinction between urban and rural. I have added the 144 deaf men and women residing in an institution to the group of urban deaf as institutions were predominantly located in the cities.

<sup>38</sup> Neither Tom De Paepe nor the *Exposé* of 1858 distinguishes between congenital and acquired impairments. Individuals could have become disabled while residing in a city.

<sup>39</sup> Mareska, J. & Heyman, J. (1845) *Enquête sur le travail et la condition physique et morale des ouvriers employés dans les manufactures de coton, à Gand*. Ghent: F. & E. Gyselynck.

**Table 5.3** Percentage experiencing marriage according to cohort and district, in %

	Birth cohort 1		Birth cohort 2	
	Deaf	Siblings	Deaf	Siblings
Aalst	21.2	33.3	5.6	55
Dendermonde	20	70	0	66.7
Eeklo	57.1	100	42.9	57.1
Ghent	8.3	71.4	19.4	65.1
Oudenaarde	13.3	73.3	4.5	68.4
Sint-Niklaas	40	66.7	25	61.1
<i>Average</i>	<i>26.7</i>	<i>69.1</i>	<i>24.5</i>	<i>62.2</i>

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Notes: for birth cohort 1, N= Aalst: 33, Dendermonde: 20, Eeklo: 7, Ghent: 49, Oudenaarde: 15, Sint-Niklaas: 15. For birth cohort 2, N= Aalst: 18 and 20, Dendermonde: 15, Eeklo: 7, Ghent: 67 and 66, Oudenaarde: 19 and 22, Sint-Niklaas: 16 and 18.

Table 5.3 reveals large differences in marriage rates between the East Flemish districts, especially in the deaf cohorts. In the first birth cohort the marriage rates of the deaf were highest in the districts of Eeklo and Sint-Niklaas, with percentages well above the average of 26.7 percent. In the discussion on the research context (2.3.2), I identified these two districts as belonging to a polder agrosystem characterized by large and medium-sized farms that predominantly employed male day labourers. De Langhe, Mechant and Devos have argued that as a result of this employment pattern, women had fewer employment opportunities and were more inclined to marry sooner to secure their survival.<sup>40</sup> Other scholars too have shown that polder areas were characterized by higher marriage rates compared to sandy soil areas.<sup>41</sup> The deaf individuals appear to fit in with this pattern. However, the hearing siblings living in Sint-Niklaas had marriage rates below average. This is in contrast to Eeklo, where all siblings entered marriage. The marriage rates of the siblings in the different districts were less divergent as rates were generally higher.

In the second birth cohort as well, marriage rates among the deaf were highest in the polder districts of Sint-Niklaas and Eeklo. Districts characterized by a linen industry, such as Aalst and Oudenaarde, had the lowest rates. These rates can be related to the opportunities the cottage industry offered to singles to provide for their livelihood. The better employment opportunities for singles made it less pressing for men and women

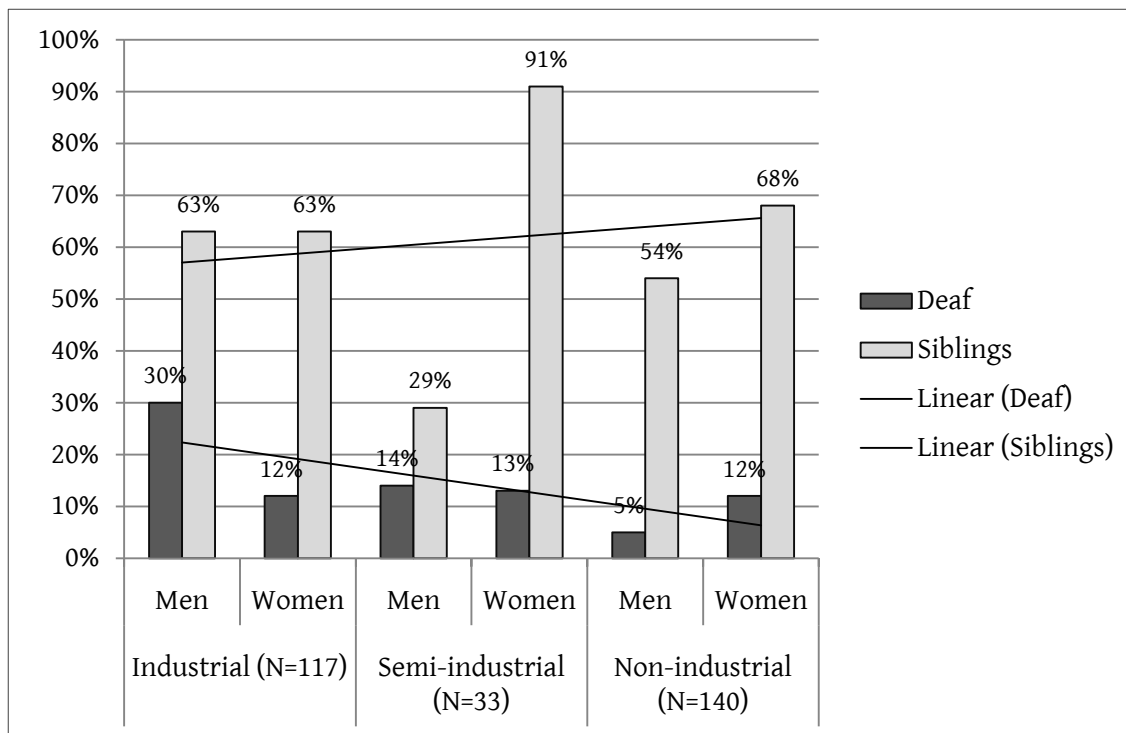
<sup>40</sup> De Langhe, S., Mechant, M. & Devos, I. (2011) "Regionale verschillen in het leven van ongehuwde moeders op het platteland in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden, 1730-1846" *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis*, 8/1, 2-28.

<sup>41</sup> Zwaenepoel, N. (2005) *Het Brugse Vrije anno 1748. Socio-demografische analyse van een rurale samenleving medio achttiende eeuw*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished master's dissertation), 39-41.

to leave the parental household and marry. Although the marriage rate of the hearing population was the lowest in Aalst, the differences with the other districts were less pronounced. As there was less pressure for individuals to marry, we may assume that hearing men and women were more selective, which may have negatively affected the marriage opportunities of the deaf in particular. The district of Ghent was the only district in which marriage rates for the deaf went up in the second half of the nineteenth century. The higher marriage rates may be related to the presence of a deaf school within its borders – it was the only district to have one – and the larger concentration of deaf individuals in the district’s urban capital, Ghent.

Finally, I can plot the marriage rates of the second birth cohort according to the level of industrialization of the municipalities in which the individuals were born. The results are presented in figure 5.3.

**Figure 5.3** Percentage experiencing marriage according to level of industrialization, in %



Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Notes: for industrial, N= 33 deaf men, 25 deaf women, 32 brothers, 27 sisters; for semi-industrial, N= 7 deaf men, 8 deaf women, 7 brothers, 11 sisters; for non-industrial, N= 39 deaf men, 33 deaf women, 37 brothers, 31 sisters.

Figure 5.3 is designed to show whether living in an industrial village negatively affected a person’s marriage opportunities. Comparing the percentages of married men and women across the three types of municipalities, we find no evidence of a negative effect of industrialization on marriage prospects. For deaf women, marriage rates were comparable across the three categories. This finding is in line with the previous observation

that the marriage rates of deaf women underwent no decline in the course of the nineteenth century and were thus not subject to socio-economic developments (such as industrialization) in a negative way. Moreover, deaf men living in an industrial municipality had the highest marriage rates. In the non-industrial villages, the marriage rates of the deaf men were extremely low. This observation suggests that living in an industrial setting did not necessarily lead to unfavourable marriage prospects. In other words, the previously established decrease in marriage frequency of deaf men cannot be explained by simply referring to socio-economic developments such as industrialization. One explanation for the higher marriage rates in the industrial settings may be that all but three of the industrial municipalities were cities. The previous analysis confirmed that urban living had a positive effect on deaf people's marriage prospects. Another explanation may lie in the employment characteristics of the deaf men in the industrial centres. In Chapter 4, I showed that urban (and industrial) deaf men were more often employed in the garment trade or other crafts, compared to rural deaf men who were more often employed as unskilled labourers or in textile production. The occupations exercised by the urban deaf men were thus more highly valued than those practised by rural deaf men. As a result, urban deaf men may have made more attractive marriage partners. In 5.3.2, I illustrate in more detail how civil status was related to a person's socio-economic status. The marriage rates of the hearing siblings do not exhibit a distinct pattern. Prospects for the brothers were highest in industrial municipalities, although the difference with non-industrial villages is limited. The difference in marriage rates for the sisters is slightly in favour of non-industrial municipalities, but to a limited extent.

A first step in the analysis of the marriage opportunities for deaf men and women was to examine the marriage frequency: did deaf people marry less than hearing people? Based on the results above, the answer is undoubtedly affirmative. Marriage rates of deaf men and women were significantly lower than those of their hearing siblings. However, the assumption that marriage opportunities for the deaf in particular declined in the course of the nineteenth century, due to developments such as industrialization and the rise of eugenics, is not confirmed. Differences in marriage rates between the pre-industrial and industrial cohorts are limited. Fewer of the deaf men born in the second birth cohort married, but this was also the case for the hearing male population. For deaf women marriage rates even increased. Looking at the marriage rates according to the level of industrialization reaffirmed that living in an industrial setting did not negatively influence one's marriage prospects. However, other features of a person's living environment did affect marriage opportunities. The comparison of marriage rates according to the environment (urban/rural) and district showed that more deaf men and women living in the city or in a polder district entered marriage.



### 5.3.1.2 Age at (first) marriage

A second characteristic that may reflect the difficulties the deaf encountered in marriage is the age at (first) marriage. The assumption is that the higher the average age at marriage, the more difficulties a person encountered in finding a suitable spouse.

Table 5.4 shows the mean and median age at first marriage according to birth cohort and gender. The table is based on the ages at first marriage of 222 of the 239 married research individuals. The marriage certificates of 17 research individuals, who are known to have married, could not be found. Subsequently, I do not know their exact age at marriage.

**Table 5.4** Mean (M) and Median (Md) age at first marriage, in years

	Birth cohort 1				Birth cohort 2			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	M	Md	M	Md	M	Md	M	Md
Deaf	34	31.8	38.9	38.9	35.1	35.6	28.4	27.6
Siblings	28.1	26.9	28.7	27.3	28.3	27.3	28.1	25.9

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

The deaf men and women born in the first birth cohort were on average 36.5 years old at first marriage, which is well above the average sibling age of 28.4. In line with their lower marriage rates, deaf women married at an especially high age. The only two married deaf women were approaching their forties at marriage. Thus not only did deaf women have more difficulties in entering marriage than deaf men, but they were also much older when they eventually did so. The difference in marriage age between the deaf and hearing men was smaller, but deaf men were still considerably older at the time of marriage.

In the course of the nineteenth century, marriage ages changed differently across the cohorts. Among the hearing siblings the mean and median ages remained more or less the same. In the male deaf cohort the mean and median ages increased. In the female deaf cohort however, parallel with the increase in marriage frequency the average age at marriage came down to 28.4 – comparable to the average age at marriage of the non-deaf women. So, while the difference in age at marriage between deaf and hearing men increased, the difference between women declined.

A similar calculation of the mean and median ages at first marriage according to levels of industrialization is shown in table 5.5. Despite the low numbers, table 5.5 shows that

the ages at marriage were generally lower in industrial municipalities than in non-industrial ones.<sup>42</sup> Thus, parallel with a higher incidence of marriage in the industrial centres, men and women married at a younger age. Previous research has indicated that farmers had the most restrictive marriage behaviour, while people from the working classes married at a younger age. With no possibility of inheriting property, working class men and women had less reason to postpone marriage.<sup>43</sup> As farming was more characteristic of non-industrial towns and day labouring for industrial towns, socio-economic factors may account for the difference in marriage ages between the two settings. Although both the deaf and hearing population have lower marriage ages in the industrial towns, differences emerge among the population. For deaf men the mean and median ages were considerably higher than for the hearing men. This suggests that factors other than socio-economic background played a role as well. Differences between the deaf and hearing women were more limited. In the non-industrial towns too the average ages at marriage were considerably higher among the deaf.

**Table 5.5** Mean (M) and Median (Md) age at first marriage according to industrialization, in years

	Industrial (N=11;33)				Semi- industrial (N=2;12)				Non-industrial (N=6;41)			
	Men		Women		Men		Women		Men		Women	
	M	Md	M	Md	M	Md	M	Md	M	Md	M	Md
Deaf	33.3	33.8	26.6	26.7	23.8	23.8	26.5	26.5	47.7	47.7	30.3	31.7
Siblings	25.3	25.2	26.7	25.7	31	31	30.6	27.9	30.6	29.4	28	25.7

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

In short, the analysis of the average ages at marriage confirms that not only were deaf individuals less likely to marry than hearing people, but they were also considerably older when they eventually did marry. In industrial areas, the marriage frequency was higher and average marriage ages were lower. This probably reflects the different socio-economic background of people living in industrial (urban) and non-industrial (rural) settings.

<sup>42</sup> Results in the semi-industrial category are not discussed as the mean and median ages at marriage of the deaf cohort are based on just one man and one woman.

<sup>43</sup> Van Poppel, F., Ekamper, P. & van Solinge, H. (2007) "Farmer Looking for a Wife: Marital Behavior of the Farming Population in Nineteenth-Century Netherlands" In: Moerbeek, H.H.S. & Niehof, A. (eds.) *Changing Families and Their Lifestyles*. Wageningen: Wageningen Academic Publishers, v.2, 53-4.

### 5.3.1.3 Characteristics of the spouses

Finally, I address the characteristics of the spouses. Marriages in the eighteenth and nineteenth century were characterized by a high degree of homogeneity or endogamy, implying that men and women were mainly engaged in 'equal' marriages. Marriages are considered equal when they involve age peers with a similar social, socio-professional and geographical background.

*Social endogamy* entails that the research individuals looked for a spouse within their own social class, based on the status of both parental households. As the social class of many of the spouses could not be retrieved in the marriage certificates, comparing social class is impossible in this research. However, based on the occupations at marriage of the spouses themselves, I can examine the extent of socio-professional endogamy. Individuals on the marriage market sought a spouse with attractive socio-economic resources. Highly skilled marriage candidates selected among themselves, while the least attractive candidates had to rely on one another. When a person managed to marry a spouse with a higher socio-economic status (SES), they were engaged in upward mobility. The concept of downward mobility implies that a person married a person with a lower SES. By means of the SOCPPO classification scheme, I have assigned each research person and spouse a SES based on their occupation at marriage. Men and women could be classified into three categories of SES: unskilled (code 1), (semi-)skilled (code 23) and middle class (code 45).<sup>44</sup> In the analysis I make a distinction between individuals marrying within the same SES (thus 1-1, 23-23 and 45-45), and those marrying outside their SES (thus 1-23, 1-45 and 23-45). For the individuals marrying outside their SES, I distinguish between those marrying up (percentage on the left) and those marrying down (percentage on the right). In other words, within the category 1-23, the percentage on the left represents the unskilled deaf or hearing individuals marrying up with a (semi-)skilled spouse. The percentage on the right represents the (semi-)skilled research individuals marrying down with an unskilled spouse.

*Geographical endogamy* implies that individuals married a spouse from the same area. According to Vandembroeke, in the nineteenth century two in three couples consisted of persons born in the same municipality.<sup>45</sup> Geographical endogamy was the result of limited mobility and arose from a wish to engage in a social endogamous marriage: if one married a partner whose family was familiar, there would be fewer surprises with regard to the family-in-law's status and reputation. In the late nineteenth century and

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<sup>44</sup> The SOCPPO classification scheme consists of five classes. For practical reasons I have combined classes 2 and 3 (therefore code 23) and classes 4 and 5 (therefore code 45).

<sup>45</sup> Vandembroeke, C. (1981) *Sociale geschiedenis van het Vlaamse volk*. Beveren: Orion, 89.

early twentieth century, parallel with developments such as improvements within transport and ways of communication, the geographical horizon started to widen.<sup>46</sup>

Instead of focusing on the distance between the birthplaces of the two spouses, I have chosen to compare the birthplaces to the place of marriage. This means I can divide the couples according to four types of marriage. Marriages in which:

- 1) both spouses were native to the place of marriage (*native*),
- 2) the research individual had migrated to the place of marriage (*migrant*),
- 3) the spouse was a migrant to the place of marriage (*spouse migrant*),
- 4) both spouses were migrants (*both migrants*).

In this way, the analysis can also provide insight into how likely it was for individuals to marry after migration or how keen people were to marry a non-native spouse.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, *age endogamy* means that spouses were about the same age. Age endogamy has been considered an indication of the equality of a relationship. A large age difference is assumed to point to an economic contract and denotes a patriarchal system, while a small difference is seen to reflect a more romantic relationship as age peers have more in common, i.e. values and life experiences.<sup>48</sup> In the analysis I calculate the mean and median age differences between the spouses and divide the population into categories with an age difference smaller than 1 year, between 2 and 4 years, between 5 and 9 years, and 10 years and over.

Table 5.6 presents the results for marriage homogeneity between the spouses according to age, socio-professional status and birthplace for the deaf and hearing research populations. As the age at marriage, occupation and birthplace is not known for all the research individuals and/or spouses, the population size can deviate from the total number of 48 deaf and 191 hearing marriages. Due to the low number of deaf marriages, I do not distinguish between the first and second birth cohort in the analysis. However, if differences between the two cohorts are noteworthy, they are addressed in the discussion.

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<sup>46</sup> Ekamper, P., Faes, C. & van Poppel, F. (2010) “Vrijers die van verre komen, zijn te schromen’: geografische homogamie van huwelijkspartners, 1812-1922” *Mens en Maatschappij*, 85/4, 380-404.

<sup>47</sup> For more on migration and endogamy: e.g. Pélissier, J.P. et al. (2005) “Migration and Endogamy According to Social Class: France, 1803-1986” *International Review of Social History*, 50, 219-46.

<sup>48</sup> Van den Driessche, N. & Van De Putte, B. (2010) *Partner Selection in 19th Century Western Flanders: a Complex Process. The Effect of Age Homogamy on Social Heterogamy*. Paper prepared for the European Population Conference (Ghent); Van de Putte, B. et al. (2009) “The Rise of Age Homogamy in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Western Europe” *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 71, 1234-53.

**Table 5.6** Marriage homogeneity between the spouses, in %

Age endogamy (%)							
	Mean (y)	Median (y)	<1	1-4	5-9	+10	N
Deaf							
Men	7.59	5.39	14.7	29.4	26.5	29.4	34
Women	5.71	5.17	10	40	30	20	10
Siblings							
Men	5.64	3.52	13.5	43.8	25.8	16.9	89
Women	5.82	3.85	12.9	50.5	21.5	15.1	93
Socio-professional endogamy (%) <sup>49</sup>							
	Same	1-23	1-45	23-45			N
Deaf							
Men	60	6.7/10	0/0	10/13.3			30
Women	70	10/10	0/0	0/10			10
Siblings							
Men	49.3	20.9/7.5	4.5/1.5	7.5/9			67
Women	56	10.7/13.1	6/1.2	7.1/6			84
Geographical endogamy (%)							
	Native	Migrant	Spouse migrant	Both migrants			N
Deaf							
Men	34.4	18.8	34.4	12.4			32
Women	30	30	40	0			10
Siblings							
Men	51.8	18.8	21.2	8.2			85
Women	46.7	8.9	35.6	8.9			90

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Starting by looking at the age gap, we find an average age difference of respectively 7.6 and 5.7 years between the deaf men and deaf women and their spouses. In the sibling cohort, the age difference with the spouses was respectively 5.6 and 5.8 years. These averages show that the age difference between deaf men and their spouses was generally higher than that for hearing men.<sup>50</sup> The difference was smaller between the deaf and hearing women, but the median still reveals a difference of about 1.3 years between

<sup>49</sup> The low numbers are mainly due to the high amount of women without registered occupation.

<sup>50</sup> 9 deaf men were on average 2.8 years younger than their spouses. The other 25 men were on average 9.3 years older than their spouses. 35 of the 89 non-disabled brothers were on average 4.9 years younger than their spouses, while those that were older were on average 6 years older.

them. The larger age difference between the deaf and their spouses is also apparent in the four age ranges. About 56 percent of the deaf men and 50 percent of the deaf women married a spouse who was more than five years older or younger. In the sibling population, fewer individuals married such a spouse – respectively about 43 and 38 of the brothers and sisters. A separate calculation of the age difference in the first and second birth cohorts shows that, among the deaf men and women, the average age gap (both genders) increased from 6.7 to 7.9 years in the course of the nineteenth century. In the hearing cohorts, on the other hand, the age gap (both genders) fell from an average of 6.5 years to 4.9 years. The declining age gap experienced by the siblings was part of a general rise in age homogamy in the nineteenth century. This rise has been related to a shift to a less instrumental, more egalitarian view on marriage and partner choice. Changes in the institutional context, the increase in migration and urbanization, the development of mass communication and trends of secularization led to the emergence of a value system that stressed individual happiness, self-expression and self-development and turned partner selection into a private matter. Smaller age differences are interpreted as the outcome of a more romantic partner choice between spouses who share the same life experiences.<sup>51</sup> Starting from this observation, the larger age gap in the deaf marriages suggests that the deaf and their spouses were less equal and that partner choice was perhaps less the result of romantic love – to a growing extent in the nineteenth century. Charles Janssens, born deaf in Ghent in 1838, got married at the age of 44 to the 25-year younger Marie Louise Masseur, who had lost both parents and migrated from Namur to Ghent one and a half years before the marriage. Abandoned to her fate in an unfamiliar city, Marie Louise was perhaps more inclined to marry a deaf man. Carolus Rijkaert was 31 when he married the 7-year older Maria Devos. As she was approaching her forties, Maria may have thought that time was running out, rendering Carolus a sufficiently suitable partner. Although the interpretation of these life trajectories is of course speculative, the generally higher age difference between the deaf and their spouses indicates a more unequal position on the marriage market.

The second part of table 5.6 examines the socio-professional endogamy based on the socio-economic status of the brides and grooms. It shows that the majority of the deaf

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<sup>51</sup> Van den Driessche, N. & Van De Putte, B. (2010) *Partner Selection in 19th Century Western Flanders*, 3-4; Shorter, E. (1975) *The Making of the Modern Family*. New York: Basic Books, 369. See also: Beekink, E., Liefbroer, A.C. & van Poppel, F. (1998) "Changes in Choice of Spouse as an Indicator of a Society in a State of Transition: Woerden, 1830-1930" *Historical Social Research*, 23/1-2, 231-53; Van de Putte, B. & Matthijs, K. (2001a) "Romantic Love and Marriage: a Study of Age Homogamy in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Leuven" *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, 31/3-4, 579-619; Coontz, S. (2005) *Marriage, a History. From Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage*. New York: Penguin Group.

and hearing population married a spouse with the same characteristics.<sup>52</sup> Respectively 60 and 70 percent of the deaf men and women married an equal spouse, compared to 49 and 56 percent of the brothers and sisters. In the marriages with a divergent socio-economic status, we find no evidence of a distinct downward mobility among the deaf. About 23 percent of the deaf men and 20 percent of the deaf women married a spouse with a lower SES. This is comparable to the percentages for the sibling population, of whom 18 percent of the brothers and 20 percent of the sisters married down. In other words, deaf individuals were not under substantially more pressure to lower their standards and marry a lower class spouse than their hearing siblings. However, it does seem that deaf men and women were less successful in marrying a spouse from a higher SES. Only about 17 percent of the deaf men and 10 percent of the deaf women married up. In contrast, in the sibling cohorts about 33 percent of the men and 24 percent of the women married a more highly qualified spouse. The much higher rates among the siblings hint that upward mobility was more easily achievable for the hearing.

The last part of table 5.6 compares the birthplace of both spouses to the place of marriage. In the sibling cohort, as in the general population, the majority of the men (51.8 percent) and women (46.7 percent) married a spouse in the town where they were both born. This was not the case for the deaf men and women. Only about one-third of the deaf men and women (respectively 34.4 and 30 percent) were engaged in a *native* marriage. Deaf men and women were thus less likely to marry a spouse who had been around since childhood. More often, the deaf married a spouse who had migrated to their birthplace: respectively about 34 and 40 percent of the deaf men and women married a migrant spouse. When the spouse migrated to the hometown of the deaf person is unknown. A spouse may have migrated years, weeks or days before the marriage to the place of marriage. In this regard, it should be mentioned that until the twentieth century it was common practice for a couple to marry in the bride's place of birth. As a result, the high number of deaf women (and hearing women for that matter) marrying a migrant spouse might only be a reflection of this tradition. However, this does not explain the higher percentage of deaf men marrying a migrant spouse. For deaf men, the percentages may indicate that they were more eligible among women who, as a migrant, experienced difficulties on the marriage market as they were less socially embedded within the community. Respectively 18.8 percent of both deaf and hearing men married in a town other than their place of birth (they were themselves migrants).

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<sup>52</sup> A marriage between two (semi-)skilled workers was most common within this category: respectively 64 and 53.8 percent of the deaf and hearing marriages. Van de Putte, Oris and Matthijs have shown that the chances of marrying out of the lower classes was rare: Van de Putte, B., Oris, M. & Matthijs, K. (2009) "Marrying Out of the Lower Classes in Nineteenth-Century Belgium" *Continuity and Change*, 24/3, 421-53.

Again, the custom of marrying in the bride's hometown may explain these percentages. However, 30 percent of the deaf women were themselves migrants compared to a mere 9 percent in the female sibling cohort. Deaf women were apparently more likely to marry after migration. This observation can mean two things. On the one hand, it may indicate that more deaf women were necessitated to search for a spouse outside the borders of their home town. On the other hand, the percentage can be a reflection of higher migration rates among deaf women, which in turn increased the opportunities for deaf women to meet and marry a husband from outside their home town. The fact that many deaf women left their home town to be educated in the city of Ghent seems herein of crucial importance. Indeed, a closer look at the deaf migrant spouses shows that all of them married in the city of Ghent with a husband born in Ghent.<sup>53</sup> In both the deaf and sibling population it was uncommon for both spouses to be migrants. This is consistent with previous studies that have shown that migrants encountered more difficulties on the marriage market.<sup>54</sup>

To sum up, table 5.6 shows that deaf men and women were more often married to a partner with a large age difference. Moreover, a comparison between the first and second birth cohort shows that the age gap increased in the nineteenth century. Supported by sociological research, the larger age gap in the deaf marriages can be considered an indication that deaf people were engaged in marriages which were less the result of romantic love and less equal. Similar to the general population, most deaf men and women married a spouse with the same socio-professional status. However, compared to their hearing siblings fewer of them were able to marry a spouse from a higher SES. This suggests that more highly ranked spouses were less willing to ignore the lower SES of their spouses if the spouses were deaf. Finally, I established that more deaf persons married a spouse who was born in a different village – either because they had migrated or because their spouse was a migrant. The higher percentages of deaf marriages involving migration may reflect both the greater necessity for deaf people to search for a spouse outside their hometown and their higher eligibility among migrants who were less socially embedded.

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<sup>53</sup> Similarly, H. Bras and J. Kok showed that female domestic servants in the nineteenth-century were more often marrying outside their place of birth due to their occupational migration. Bras, H. & Kok, J. (2005) "They Live in Indifference Together'. Marriage Mobility in Zeeland (The Netherlands) 1795-1922" In: Van Leeuwen, M.H.D., Maas, I. & Miles, A. (eds.) *Marriage Choices and Class Boundaries: Social Endogamy in History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 247-74.

<sup>54</sup> E.g. Vikström, L. (2003) *Gendered Routes and Courses. The Socio-Spatial Mobility of Migrants in Nineteenth-Century Sundsvall, Sweden*. Umea: Umea University (unpublished PhD dissertation); Oris, M. (2000) "The Age at Marriage of Migrants During the Industrial Revolution in the Region of Liège" *The History of the Family*, 5/4, 391-413.



Finally, with regard to the profile of the spouses we can mention the notion of *intermarriage*. As mentioned above, by the end of the nineteenth century the intermarriage of deaf men and women was being debated at an international level, as part of a growing eugenics movement.<sup>55</sup> From a practical perspective, it would indeed seem more easily achievable for deaf people to make contact with other deaf people. They could communicate through sign language and shared the same experiences of being ‘different’ from hearing persons. Moreover, the development of deaf schools and clubs during the nineteenth century provided opportunities for deaf men and women to meet.

Assessing whether this was actually the case by means of empirical research has proved more difficult. In a few marriage certificates the town clerk did mention the presence of a sign language interpreter to facilitate communication with one or both deaf spouses. Occasionally impairments were recorded in population registers.<sup>56</sup> However, in the majority of the life trajectories sources that identified spouses as deaf or otherwise impaired – or most certainly non-disabled – were scarce. For the marriages in the first birth cohort especially, in the absence of population registers, the information was difficult to come by. As a result, I could only determine the *disability status* of 18 of the 48 spouses with certainty. In the remaining 30 marriages, mostly belonging to the first research period, it is unknown whether the spouse was disabled or not.

For seven deaf persons, I could ascertain that they married a spouse who was disabled.<sup>57</sup> In all cases the spouse was deaf-mute as well. Edmond Francois Bresous, born deaf in Ghent in 1853, even got married twice to a deaf-mute woman. The eight intermarriages took place between 1875 and 1913, a period in which the deaf community was in full development. All marriages took place in the city of Ghent, a city that provided both deaf schools and clubs. Three research individuals were born in Ghent and the other four came to Ghent to attend a deaf school and stayed on in the city. Similarly, four of the spouses were born in Ghent, while the four others were born outside Ghent. However, all spouses were residing in Ghent at the time of marriage. All the spouses were able to sign their marriage certificate, suggesting they too had enjoyed an education in the city. This assumption is backed up by the occupations of the spouses: shoemakers, tailors and seamstresses - occupations typical for the vocational training provided by the deaf schools.

For the majority of the deaf spouses, it is unknown whether they married a person who was deaf as well. Nonetheless, in the absence of deaf schools and considering the

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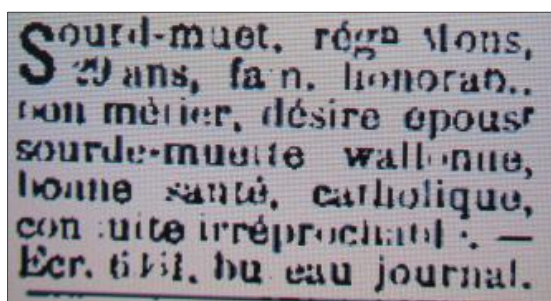
<sup>55</sup> E.g. Gallaudet, E. (1890) “The Intermarriage of the Deaf, and Their Education” *Science*, 16/408, 295-9.

<sup>56</sup> However, in many municipalities the town clerks found it unnecessary to report impairments. When the impairment of a deaf research individual was not recorded either, it is impossible to make statements about the presence or absence of an impairment in the spouse.

<sup>57</sup> This includes two research individuals married to each other.

low number of deaf individuals in the province (see table 2.9: 1 in 2391 inhabitants in 1835) it seems unlikely that deaf individuals of the first birth cohort would meet and marry other deaf individuals in the local area.<sup>58</sup> Thus most married deaf individuals presumably married a hearing person. In the course of the second half of the nineteenth century, opportunities for deaf men and women to meet increased. That it remained difficult for deaf individuals to find a deaf spouse, however, is suggested by a wanted advertisement published in the newspaper *La Libre Belgique* in 1922 (figure 5.4). In the advertisement a 29-year-old deaf man from an “honourable family” and with a “good occupation” expresses his wish to find a nice deaf-mute bride “in good health, Catholic, and with impeccable behaviour”.

**Figure 5.4** Wanted advertisement in *La Libre Belgique*, September 8, 1922



The marriage between a disabled and non-disabled person was a popular topic in English literature in the eighteenth century, according to David Turner. The *mismatched* couple was an integral part of early modern humour and a recurring theme in jest books. That any person of sound body would choose an impaired person as a partner was received with astonishment, as such a choice was thought unwise and could cause the non-disabled person to lose face among their peers. These kinds of marriages broke the ideal of parity in partner choice and anxieties about reproduction were never far off. In the literature, the choice of non-disabled persons for a disabled partner was explained by the advantages a disabled partner entailed. Turner refers in that matter to Jonathan Swift’s epigram on deafness. Despite the hardships of being deaf, it “*had the compensating quality that it made men unable to ‘hear a Woman’s clack’*”. The “*quietest marriage*”, according to Swift, was one where “*the wife is blind and the husband deaf*”.<sup>59</sup> It may be interesting for future disability history researchers to look for similar literature in Belgium.

<sup>58</sup> Ministère de l’intérieur (1864) *Statistique générale de la Belgique: exposé de la situation du Royaume (période décennale de 1851-1860)*. Brussels: Lesigne.

<sup>59</sup> Turner, D.M. (2012) *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England: Imagining Physical Impairment*. New York: Routledge, 67-9.

### 5.3.2 Explaining the marriage pattern of the deaf

Were the low marriage rates of the deaf solely the result of their disability, or did other factors also act as a barrier to marriage? Here I attempt to identify the factors in the lives of the deaf that reduced their opportunities for marriage through bivariate and multivariate analysis methods. On the one hand, it can be assumed that certain specificities in the lives of the deaf in general, such as a higher incidence of institutionalization and unemployment, negatively affected their marriage chances compared to hearing men and women, who were less likely to be institutionalized and unemployed. On the other hand, it would be interesting to examine why some deaf men and women were successful on the marriage market and others were not.

I first analyse the chances of marriage on an aggregate level by using Kaplan Meier graphs and Cox event history models (in 5.3.2.1). These techniques enable one to evaluate marriage chances in relation to demographic covariates such as gender, socio-economic background, birth order and residential situation. These covariates were not necessarily different for the deaf as a group, but may have influenced marriage opportunities for the deaf in a different way. The analysis is based on a research group of 547 research individuals, 222 of them married and 325 unmarried. 21 individuals were left out of the analysis because the exact timing of their marriage was unknown or their civil status was uncertain.<sup>60</sup>

I then investigate the relationship between civil status and two characteristics that were distinctly different for the deaf compared to the hearing – the level of unemployment and institutionalization (in 5.3.2.2). Additionally, by focusing on individual stories of married deaf men and women, I attempt to find out why some deaf individuals were more successful on the marriage market than others.

#### 5.3.2.1 Measuring the impact of covariates: multivariate analysis

The descriptive analysis in 5.3.1 revealed that the frequency and age at first marriage varied according to the presence of a disability and a person's gender, birth cohort and living environment. As cross tabulations do not allow to control for several variables at the same time, they cannot be used to specify which of these factors had a decisive effect on the probability of marriage, and thus determine the significant impact of an auditory disability. Moreover, to investigate the *magnitude* and *significance* of these different factors with regard to the probability of marriage, an analytical or explanatory

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<sup>60</sup> Event history analysis requires information on the exact timing of an event.

model is required. I have chosen to apply a Cox regression as this event history approach also takes into account duration (see 2.2.1.3). I ran four models in Stata 11: one for the deaf separately, one for the women and two for the men. The model for the men is split at age 30 because of non-proportionality issues.<sup>61</sup>

### **Variables of interest**

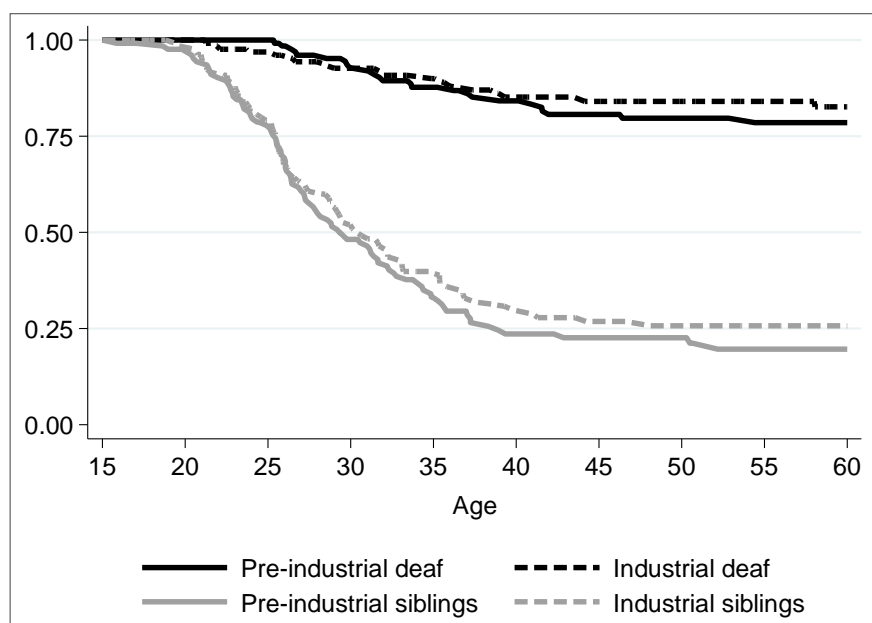
Keeping the research questions in mind, the analysis starts with two main covariates: *disability* and *birth cohort*. Firstly, I assume that a disability reduced one's probability of getting married. The low marriage frequency of the deaf, as shown in the 5.3.1, is an important indication of their disadvantaged position on the marriage market. In the Cox regression deaf people are considered the reference category, as opposed to the hearing siblings. Secondly, I test the assumption of an increased segregation of disabled people in the course of the nineteenth century by distinguishing between a pre-industrial (reference) and industrial cohort. So far, I have found a negative effect of nineteenth-century developments on the total population (general lower marriage frequencies), but not for the deaf in particular.

Kaplan Meier survival curves can be used to show the probability of 'surviving' (not experiencing) an event within a given period of time. Figure 5.5 shows the Kaplan Meier curves for the probability of marriage according to the two main variables of interest: disability and birth cohort. The higher the curves, the greater the chance of 'surviving' marriage and thus remaining permanently single. The x-axis starts at 15 years old, which is generally considered the beginning of marriageable age. I have right-censored the graph at 60 years old as no research individual married after that age (the oldest research individual to marry was 58 years old).

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<sup>61</sup> The main assumption of the Cox regression is that the effects of covariates remain unchanged during the whole period under observation. In other words, that they are proportional through time. In this specific case, for example, a Cox model assumes that the influence of a person's gender on his or her propensity to marry remains the same at every time (age). In the male model, the proportionality assumption did not hold for all covariates. Therefore, I chose to split the time axis (period under observation) into two sections (younger and older than age 30) within which the proportionality assumption did hold, continuing with a separate analysis for each age group.

**Figure 5.5** Kaplan Meier survival estimates for the probability of marriage, by disability and birth cohort



The results in figure 5.5 confirm that deaf men and women from both birth cohorts were more likely to remain unmarried. The curves of the deaf cohorts (black lines) are situated much higher in the plot region than the sibling curves (gray lines), indicating the high survival rates for the deaf. With regard to the effect of birth cohort, we find that until the age of around 40 marriage prospects for the deaf were more or less similar in both periods. After that age, the curves cross and the probability of marriage changed in favour of the pre-industrial cohort. In other words, marrying at an older age was more easily achievable in the pre-industrial period. As mortality was higher in the pre-industrial period, widows and widowers would regularly re-enter the marriage market, providing new potential spouses and therefore increasing marriage opportunities. By and large, however, the difference between the two birth cohorts is limited. In the sibling cohorts, the differences in survival between the two birth cohorts are also limited until around age 26. From that age onwards, the probability of marriage was higher in the pre-industrial period. The Kaplan Meier graph thus confirms that marriage rates decreased in the course of the nineteenth century, but not particularly for the deaf.

It can be assumed that success on the marriage market was not only influenced by the presence of a disability and a person's birth cohort, but also by the interaction with characteristics such as gender, living environment, socio-economic status and birth order.

- *Gender*: the most obvious covariate to take into account is gender. In 5.3.1 I showed that the marriage rates of deaf women were lower than those of deaf men in both birth cohorts. In the Cox model for the deaf individuals (model 1 in Table 5.8), men are considered the reference group, as opposed to women. In models 2 to 4, I have

chosen to design separate models for women and men. As we can assume there were differences in marriage prospects for men and women that were unrelated to the presence of a disability, I consider it a more fruitful approach to compare deaf women with hearing women and deaf men with hearing men, instead of making comparisons across both genders.

- *Living environment*: with regard to living environment, I distinguish between three categories: urban stayers (reference), rural stayers and migrants. People in the category *urban stayers* were born and lived in the same city their whole lives. Similarly, *rural stayers* were people born and residing in the same rural village. Individuals in the *migrant* category moved between rural and/or urban municipalities (before marriage or the age of 50). The latter category is considered more mobile, which is associated with more difficulties on the marriage market.<sup>62</sup> Taking into account migration, instead of only the birthplace as in the previous analysis, allows one to measure more accurately the effect of a person's living environment during adult life.
- *Socio-economic status*: the third group of variables examines the effect of socio-economic status, based on the highest rated occupation of the father. Based on a modification of the SOCPO scheme, a distinction is made between research individuals born in a family with a father belonging to the group of (1) unskilled workers (reference), (2) semi-skilled and skilled workers, (3) middle class and elite workers.<sup>63</sup> Getting married implied that one had the necessary resources to set up an independent household. These resources varied according to the occupational group. In line with previous studies, I assume lower marriage opportunities for sons and daughters of farmers and the elite (third category) due to more restrictive inheritance regulations.<sup>64</sup> The higher marriage age in non-industrial settings compared to industrial settings (table 5.5) has already suggested that rural occupations, such as farming, entailed a higher marriage age than industrial occupations, such as factory work.

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<sup>62</sup> Oris, M. (2003) "The History of Migration as a Chapter in the History of the European Family: an Overview" *The History of the Family: An International Quarterly*, 8/2, 192. For more on rural and urban nuptiality, see: Van Der Woude, A., De Vries, J. & Hayami, A. (1990) *Urbanization in History. A Process of Dynamic Interactions*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

<sup>63</sup> The SOCPO classification scheme is an alternative to the HISCO scheme. Both schemes provide a way of classifying historical occupations in socio-economic groups. For more on HISCO and SOCPO classification schemes: Van Leeuwen, M.H.D., Maas, I. & Miles, A. (2002) *HISCO - Historical International Standard Classification of Occupations*. Leuven: Leuven University Press; Van De Putte, B. & Miles, A. (2005) "A Social Classification Scheme for Historical Occupational Data. Partner Selection and Industrialism in Belgium and England, 1800-1918" *Historical Methods*, 38/2, 61-92.

<sup>64</sup> E.g. Bengtsson, T. & Mineau, G.P. (eds.) (2008) *Kinship and Demographic Behavior in the Past*. Dordrecht: Springer.

- *Birth order*: the presence of siblings determines a person's birth rank, which has proven to influence an individual's marriage chances.<sup>65</sup> In this study three categories of birth rank are created: (1) first born child, (2) second and third born children, (3) fourth and higher birth rank. Marriage chances are assumed to be most favourable for first born children.

The Cox models in table 5.7 represent the probability of marriage according to the above-mentioned covariates. Each model mentions three numbers.

The *hazard ratio*, displayed in the first column, indicates the probability of experiencing a marriage during the observation time.<sup>66</sup> The hazard ratio of the reference group or category is 1. If the hazard ratio of a given category is lower than 1, this indicates a lower chance of marrying compared to the reference group. A ratio higher than 1 points to a higher probability of marriage.

The second column indicates whether the results are significant or not. *P-values* lower than 0.1 are considered moderately significant; those lower than 0.05 are significant and those lower than 0.01 are highly significant. A significant p-value indicates that it is unlikely that the effect of a variable is the result of chance alone.<sup>67</sup> As a population size becomes smaller, the probability of finding a relationship between variables which may be the result of chance increases. As a consequence, the risk that the p-values turn out to be insignificant is much higher in small population groups. However, the larger the effect of a variable, the smaller the sample size required to get a significant p-value. These considerations may account for some of the insignificant p-values in the deaf population, but may also highlight the importance of the variables that are significant. The insignificance of the results should not be interpreted as the variables being of no importance, but as an indication that research on a larger sample is necessary to be certain.

In the third column, the relative frequencies of each category are displayed. The *distribution* indicates the representation of each subcategory within the category as a whole (100 percent).

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<sup>65</sup> E.g. Bras, H. (2006) "Migratie en huwelijkssluiting van Zeeuwse vrouwen, 1850-1940. Broers en zusters: helpers of rivalen?" *Zeeland. Tijdschrift van het Koninklijk Zeeuwsch Genootschap der wetenschappen*, 15/1, 18-32.

<sup>66</sup> Mayer, K.U. & Brandon, T.N. (eds.) (1990) *Event History Analysis in Life Course Research*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press.

<sup>67</sup> Sirkin, R. M. (2005) *Statistics for the Social Sciences* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 271-316.

## Results

Table 5.7 presents the results of the Cox regression for the deaf population (model 1), the female population (model 2) and the male population (models 3 and 4). The hazard ratios with a significant p-value – thus, a significant effect on the chance of marriage – are in bold.

Model 1 indicates that the probability of marriage for deaf men and women was significantly affected by three covariates: gender, living environment and birth order.<sup>68</sup> Deaf women have a hazard ratio of 0.395 compared to the reference category of deaf men. In other words, they were about 60 percent less likely to marry than the deaf men. Similarly, deaf migrants had a 65 percent smaller chance of entering marriage (hazard ratio of 0.349) than urban stayers. This confirms my assumption that migrating negatively affected a person's marriage opportunities. Later on (in 6.2.4), I will show that more deaf individuals led a mobile life. The hazard ratios of the covariate *birth order* suggest that children with a higher birth order were more likely to marry: the propensity to marry was significantly higher for second or third born children, who were more than twice as likely to marry compared to first born children. This observation contradicts my expectation that first born children had higher chances of marriage. Perhaps the presence of older siblings was beneficial to the marriage opportunities of a deaf person as older siblings could introduce them to friends and, after they got married, to family-in-law. Such an expansion of the social networks of the deaf may have increased their opportunities of finding a suitable spouse. *Birth cohort* had no significant effect on a deaf individual's marriage chances, nor did *SES*. Despite the insignificance of the results, the hazard ratios suggest that marriage chances were not negatively affected by nineteenth-century developments. Finally, in line with the assumption, marriage prospects were lower for deaf people born in a middle class family.

Model 2 analyses the marriage chances of women. Comparing deaf women to their hearing sisters (covariate *disability*), we find that hearing women had an almost 14 times higher propensity to get married compared to their deaf sisters. Except for the subcategory *middle class* (covariate *SES*), none of the other variables was significant. Having a middle class father had a significant negative effect on a woman's marriage chances. Regardless of the insignificant p-values, the hazard ratios indicate that women born and living in the city or the countryside had an almost identical chance of marriage, as opposed to migrants, who had the lowest chances. Being born in the industrial birth co-

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<sup>68</sup> I have not included a separate model for the non-deaf siblings in table 5.7 as their marriage behaviour is not my main interest. However, the model can be found in the appendix.



hort suggests a negative effect on the chances of women marrying. As table 5.8 (interaction model) will show, this negative effect is predominantly caused by the diminishing number of sisters that entered marriage in the second birth cohort (and not applicable to deaf women).

In models 3 and 4, comparing the deaf and hearing men, the presence of a disability emerges again as a significant characteristic. Though less considerable than in the female population, the hearing brothers still had a 7 times higher propensity to marry before the age of 30 (model 3) and almost 2.5 times higher after the age of 30 (model 4). The smaller difference between the deaf and their brothers in model 4 is connected to the average ages at marriage of both groups. More deaf men married after their 30<sup>th</sup> birthday, while only a minority of hearing brothers still had to enter a first marriage after that age. The respective increase and decrease in the marriage frequencies of the two groups resulted in a smaller difference in the likelihood of marriage in model 4.

Men younger than 30 were significantly impacted by their socio-economic background and whether they led a sedentary or mobile life. The higher a man's socio-economic background the lower his chance of marriage, suggesting that wealth and property hampered the search (or reduced the need) for a suitable spouse. Urban stayers had the highest propensity to marry, while migrants had the lowest. In addition, men born in the industrial cohort had an approximately 38 percent lower propensity (hazard ratio 0.629) to marry compared to the pre-industrial cohort. This group of young men is the only cohort in which birth cohort has a significant effect on the probability of marriage. After the age of 30, socio-economic status and living environment lost their importance. The impact of a person's socio-economic background probably diminished as he became older. For the men over 30, it may be more revealing to test the impact of their own socio-economic status (based on their highest ranked occupation instead of that of their father) (see 5.3.2.2).

**Table 5.7** Cox regression of the probability of marrying

	Model 1 Deaf		Model 2 Women		Model 3 Men (<30)		Model 4 Men (>30)	
	Hazard ratio	p-value	Hazard ratio	p-value	Hazard ratio	p-value	Hazard ratio	p-value
<i>Birth cohort</i>								
Cohort 1 (ref)	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Cohort 2	1.196	0.670	0.970	0.903	<b>0.629</b>	0.097	1.508	0.312
<i>Gender</i>								
Male (ref)	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Female	<b>0.395</b>	0.015	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Living environment</i>								
Urban stayer (ref)	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Rural stayer	1.352	0.520	1.071	0.842	<b>0.484</b>	0.018	2.204	0.105
Migrant	<b>0.349</b>	0.022	0.660	0.281	<b>0.414</b>	0.020	0.488	0.191
<i>SES</i>								
Unskilled (ref)	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
(Semi-)skilled	1.534	0.415	1.024	0.948	<b>0.500</b>	0.038	1.422	0.606
Middle Class	0.705	0.478	<b>0.574</b>	0.090	<b>0.246</b>	0.000	1.048	0.942
<i>Birth order</i>								
First born (ref)	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Second and third born	<b>2.231</b>	0.072	1.560	0.200	1.930	0.111	1.586	0.377
Higher	1.262	0.625	1.623	0.157	1.754	0.176	1.426	0.496
<i>Disability</i>								
Deaf (ref)	-	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Hearing	-	-	<b>13.797</b>	0.000	<b>7.397</b>	0.000	<b>2.359</b>	0.018
	N individuals: 241	N individuals: 211	N individuals: 264	N individuals: 154	N individuals: 264	N individuals: 154	N individuals: 154	N individuals: 154
	N marriages: 39	N marriages: 90	N marriages: 67	N marriages: 38	N marriages: 67	N marriages: 38	N marriages: 38	N marriages: 38
	Time at risk: 8735.980	Time at risk: 5839.630	Time at risk: 3360.440	Time at risk: 3928.290	Time at risk: 3360.440	Time at risk: 3928.290	Time at risk: 3928.290	Time at risk: 3928.290
	Log likelihood: -190.5957	Log likelihood: -387.5354	Log likelihood: -316.1404	Log likelihood: -170.7065	Log likelihood: -316.1404	Log likelihood: -170.7065	Log likelihood: -170.7065	Log likelihood: -170.7065
	Prob > chi2: 0.0063	Prob > chi2: 0.0000	Prob > chi2: 0.0000	Prob > chi2: 0.0016	Prob > chi2: 0.0000	Prob > chi2: 0.0016	Prob > chi2: 0.0016	Prob > chi2: 0.0016

The downside of the models presented in table 5.7 is that they do not allow statements about the impact of the combination of the covariates. For example, model 1 shows how the marriage chances differed between deaf men and deaf women, and between the pre-industrial and industrial deaf. However, it is unclear how the propensity of marriage differed between pre-industrial and industrial deaf women, and between pre-industrial and industrial deaf men. To combine covariates, I need to design *interaction* models.

Table 5.8 shows the results of Cox regressions that model the effect of interaction variables. In the deaf model (model 1), I interact *gender* with *birth cohort*. In models 2 to 4, I combine the covariate *disability* with respectively *birth cohort*, *living environment* and *socio-economic status*.<sup>69</sup> The interaction models always control for all covariates, but only the interaction variables are reported in the table.

The interaction of gender and birth cohort in model 1 shows that pre-industrial deaf men were 87 percent more likely to marry than deaf women born in the same birth cohort (highly significant). However, the differences between the industrial cohorts of deaf men and women were insignificant. In other words, only in the pre-industrial cohort did deaf women experience disadvantages on the marriage market because of their gender. Comparing pre-industrial deaf men and women with respectively industrial deaf men and women shows that deaf individuals born in the second birth cohort had no significantly better or worse marriage prospects than those born in the first birth cohort. Not taking into account the p-values, the hazard ratios suggest that women experienced a beneficial effect from being born in the second cohort (hazard ratio goes up), while men were disadvantaged (hazard ratio goes down).

Model 2 interacts the presence of a disability in women with birth cohort, living environment and SES. All these interactions provide significant results with disability as the covariate. The pre-industrial sisters were over 36 times more likely to enter marriage than deaf women born in the same cohort. In the industrial cohort, the difference in marriage chances between deaf and hearing women decreased to 8.5 times as the hazard ratio of deaf women went up and the hazard ratio of hearing women went down. The nineteenth-century transition had no significant effect on the marriage chances of deaf women. This can be deduced from the fact that the hazard ratio of the industrial deaf women is insignificant. However, the hazard ratios of the hearing sisters are significant in both birth cohorts. This implies that sisters did experience a significant effect from being born in the second birth cohort. The effect was negative as the hazard ratio went down from 36.321 to 30.696.

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<sup>69</sup> The interaction of gender with residence and socio-economic status provided no extra significant information.

The interaction of disability with living environment shows that in each category (urban stayer, rural stayer and migrant) hearing women had significantly higher marriage chances than deaf women. The difference between deaf and hearing rural stayers was the largest. Calculating the difference between the hazard ratios of the two groups (8.209/0.319), we find that hearing rural stayers were over 25 times more likely to marry than deaf rural stayers. Hearing migrants had an about 11 times higher propensity to marry than deaf migrants. The difference was smallest among urban stayers: the likelihood of hearing urban stayers marrying was about 6 times higher. The smaller difference among urban stayers can probably be explained by the generally higher marriage rates among the urban deaf. Within the female deaf cohort, hazard ratios suggest that marriage chances were lowest among rural stayers (0.319), compared to migrants (0.399) and urban stayers (reference). However, the results are insignificant.

Finally, the interaction of disability with SES shows that hearing women always had a much higher chance of marrying compared to deaf women with the same socio-economic background. However, as women climbed in socio-economic status, the difference between deaf and hearing women declined. So, hearing women from an unskilled father were 38 times more likely to marry than deaf women from an unskilled father. In the middle class category, on the other hand, the difference shrank to a 'mere' 15 times higher chance for hearing women. The smaller difference in middle class families was the result of the lower marriage chances of hearing women rather than the higher marriage chances among the deaf women.

Models 3 and 4 present similar interactions for men younger than 30 and men older than 30. The interactions in the <30 model provide similar results to the female model. In all categories but one, hearing men were significantly more likely to marry than deaf men. However, the differences between the deaf and hearing men were much less marked than in the female cohorts. For example, in the pre-industrial cohort hearing men were about 6 times more likely to marry than deaf men born in the same cohort (in contrast to a 36 higher chance in the female model). In the industrial cohort this difference grew to a 9.6 times higher chance. However, the transition from a pre-industrial to industrial cohort was only significant in the hearing population. Hearing urban stayers had a 7 times higher propensity to marry than deaf urban stayers. In contrast to the women, the difference between deaf and hearing men was highest among the urban stayers.<sup>70</sup> Hearing rural stayers were only about 3.6 times more likely to marry than deaf rural stayers. As there was no deaf migrant younger than 30, it is difficult to make statements about migrants.

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<sup>70</sup> This is a surprising outcome as the next table (table 5.10) will show that marriage differences between deaf and hearing men were smallest in industrial towns, and most industrial towns had an urban character.

**Table 5.8** Cox regression of the probability of marrying – interaction models

	Model 1 Deaf		Model 2 Women		Model 3 Men (<30)		Model 4 Men (>30)	
	Hazard ratio	p-value	Hazard ratio	p-value	Hazard ratio	p-value	Hazard ratio	p-value
<i>Birth cohort*Gender</i>								
Cohort 1, men (ref.)	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
Cohort 1, women	<b>0.134</b>	0.008	<b>36.321</b>	0.000	<b>6.246</b>	0.000	2.105	0.120
Cohort 2, men	0.903	0.832	3.630	0.110	0.434	0.192	1.280	0.684
Cohort 2, women	0.630	0.310	<b>30.696</b>	0.000	<b>4.196</b>	0.001	<b>3.471</b>	0.009
<i>Disability*Birth cohort</i>								
Deaf, cohort 1 (ref.)								
Hearing, cohort 1								
Deaf, cohort 2								
Hearing, cohort 2								
<i>Disability*Living environment</i>								
Deaf, urban stayer (ref.)								
Hearing, urban stayer								
Deaf, rural stayer								
Hearing, rural stayer								
Deaf, migrant								
Hearing, migrant								
<i>Disability*SES</i>								
Deaf, unskilled (ref.)								
Hearing, unskilled								
Deaf, (semi-)skilled								
Hearing, (semi-)skilled								
Deaf, middle class								
Hearing middle class								

With regard to SES, we find the highest difference between men from unskilled fathers and the lowest (and even insignificant) among middle class men. As in the female cohorts, this smaller difference was predominantly the result of lower marriage rates among the middle class hearing men. In model 4 the hazard ratios of the deaf and hearing subcategories showed much less divergence and were, moreover, mostly insignificant. In other words, once men had passed the age of 30, the difference between deaf and hearing men declined.

The regressions above indicate that the transition from a pre-industrial to an industrial cohort was only significantly negative for the hearing siblings: hearing brothers and sisters were significantly less likely to marry in the second half of the nineteenth century, compared to the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. For deaf men and women, I found no significant results. To accurately test the effect of industrialization, I have designed a final Cox regression model (table 5.9) which interacts *level of industrialization* with *gender* in the deaf model (model 1) and *disability* with *level of industrialization* in the female (model 2) and male model (model 3).<sup>71</sup> The level of industrialization only applies to the birthplaces of the second birth cohort. As a result, only individuals born in the second birth cohort are included in the analysis. The regression models control for the same covariates as in the previous models, but only the results of the interaction effects are reported.

The interaction between level of industrialization and gender in model 1 suggests that the marriage chances of deaf men increased with an increase in the level of industrialization (hazard ratios increased). Deaf men born in a semi-industrial town and industrial town were respectively 1.7 and 3.1 times more likely to enter marriage than men from a non-industrial town. Among the women, the pattern is less clear. Women born in a semi-industrial town had the highest marriage chances, while the chances were more or less similar in non-industrial and industrial towns. Comparing deaf men with deaf women, the regression shows that women had a better chance of marriage in non-industrial and semi-industrial towns, while men were more eligible in industrial areas.

The interaction of disability and level of industrialization in the female cohort (model 2) shows that differences in marriage chances between hearing and deaf women declined according to the level of industrialization. While hearing women in non-industrial towns were about 10 times more likely to enter marriage than deaf women, their advantage declined to 6.7 times (6.608/0.978) in industrial towns. The smaller difference in the industrial towns can be explained by the lower marriage frequency of

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<sup>71</sup> As no proportionality problems emerged in the development of the male Cox regression model, it was no longer necessary to split the men into two age groups.

hearing women in these towns compared to non-industrial towns. Among the deaf women, the hazard ratios of the three levels of industrialization showed much less variation.

**Table 5.9** Cox regression of the probability of marrying, industrial cohort – interaction models

	<b>Model 1 Deaf</b>					
	<i>Hazard ratio</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Distribution (%)</i>			
<i>Industrialization*gender</i>						
Non-industrial men (ref.)	1	-	28.1			
Non-industrial women	1.039	0.969	23			
Semi-industrial men	1.661	0.694	5			
Semi-industrial women	3.698	0.291	5.8			
Industrial men	3.136	0.175	21.6			
Industrial women	1.273	0.811	16.5			
	<b>Model 2 Women</b>			<b>Model 3 Men</b>		
	<i>Hazard ratio</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Distribution (%)</i>	<i>Hazard ratio</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Distribution(%)</i>
<i>Disability*Industrialization</i>						
Deaf, non-industrial (ref.)	1	-	24.6	1	-	26.9
Hearing, non-industrial	<b>10.009</b>	0.000	23.1	<b>8.195</b>	0.008	24.8
Deaf, semi-industrial	1.647	0.663	6.2	2.533	0.456	4.8
Hearing, semi-industrial	<b>14.551</b>	0.000	8.5	<b>13.230</b>	0.013	3.4
Deaf, industrial	0.978	0.977	17.7	3.851	0.100	20.7
Hearing, industrial	<b>6.608</b>	0.002	20	<b>20.853</b>	0.000	19.3

A similar pattern can be discerned in the male model (model 3). The difference between the marriage chances of deaf and hearing men were largest in non-industrial towns, and decreased to a 5 times higher chance in semi-industrial and industrial towns. In contrast to the female population, however, we distinguish a gradual increase in the hazard ratios in both deaf and hearing cohorts according to the level of industrialization. Thus, while living in an industrial town had no marked positive effect for deaf and hearing women (on the contrary, a negative effect for hearing women), it did for men. Deaf men living in an industrial town were almost 4 times more likely to marry than deaf men living in a non-industrial town. Hearing men in industrial towns were about 2.5 times more likely to marry than those living in a non-industrial town. These observations are consistent with previous results (figure 5.4).

Based on the Cox regressions in this section, I can formulate some conclusions with regard to differences in marriage chances *within* the deaf population and *between* deaf and hearing individuals.

The Cox models for the deaf population showed that marriage chances were lower for deaf women, migrants and first born children. The effect of gender, however, was only significant in the first birth cohort. In the second birth cohort, differences between men and women were no longer significant. A more accurate test of industrialization by the introduction of *level of industrialization* as a covariate suggested that differences in the marriage chances of deaf men and women were largest in industrial towns. The larger difference in the industrial towns was mainly the result of a higher marriage propensity for deaf men in these towns.

The Cox analyses with *disability* as the covariate demonstrated that hearing men and women, regardless of their gender, socio-economic background and living environment, were always significantly more likely to marry than deaf men and women. Differences were especially large among women: the propensity to marry was extremely low for deaf women and much higher for hearing women. The differences in the propensity to marry between the two groups of women were largest for rural stayers, women living in non-industrial towns and among women with unskilled fathers. Within these categories, hearing women had much higher marriage chances than deaf women. In other words, in the lower socio-economic classes in the countryside, the marriage propensity for deaf women was the lowest compared to their hearing sisters. The difference in marriage propensity was more limited among urban stayers, daughters from middle class workers and women living in industrial towns. The smaller differences in these categories are mainly the result of a combination of the higher marriage chances of deaf women who are urban stayers and the lower marriage chances of hearing women in industrial towns and from middle class families. Differences were also smaller in the second birth cohort, as the hearing sisters in this birth cohort had a significantly lower marriage propensity. The effect of birth cohort was insignificant for the deaf women, but the hazard ratios suggest that their marriage propensity increased.

The differences in marriage chances between the hearing and deaf men were more limited compared to the women because of the higher marriage propensity of deaf men. In particular, after the age of 30 hearing men were 'only' 2.5 times more likely to marry than deaf men. The differences in marriage chances between hearing and deaf men were smallest among middle class sons and in industrial towns – due to a combination of the lower marriage chances of hearing middle class sons and higher marriage chances of deaf men living in industrial towns. In other words, the deaf men's marriage chances most resembled their hearing brothers when they lived in industrial areas and belonged to middle class families. Differences in marriage propensity were highest among urban stayers, sons of unskilled workers and in non-industrial towns.



### 5.3.2.2 Marriage alongside (un)employment and institutionalization

We have identified the presence of an auditory disability as a characteristic significantly affecting a person's marriage chances. But in what ways did deafness negatively affect one's success on the marriage market?

On the one hand, deafness could have constituted a *direct* obstacle. As deaf individuals are restricted in their communication with the majority of hearing men and women, they may have encountered difficulties in establishing personal relationships with future spouses. This social barrier is difficult to grasp as it left few traces in the source material. In the next chapter I will look in more detail into the social network development of deaf men and women. As for now, I only wish to stress that the day-to-day experiences of deafness and related difficulties in maintaining social relationships undoubtedly played their part in the low marriage chances of deaf men and women.

On the other hand, deafness may have limited the marriage chances of the deaf in an *indirect* way. According to Winzer, a lack of occupational stability and mobility among the disabled translated itself into straitened resources that made marriage unaffordable for them.<sup>72</sup> In Chapter 4, I argued that many deaf persons were represented in low-skilled jobs, especially in the eighteenth century, and that many of them were unemployed, to an increasing extent in the nineteenth century. Individuals with uncertain resources were presumably less attractive marriage partners, especially the men who were expected to provide for their families. Following this line of thinking, we can assume that the low marriage percentages of the deaf were partly the result of their poorer employment opportunities as opposed to the hearing. Steady employment, which was more common among the hearing (see Chapter 4), may have resulted in better prospects for marriage than an uncertain occupational career. Another factor that characterized the deaf population and may have contributed to their lower marriage rates is *institutionalization*. In 2.3.4 I showed how the percentage of institutionalized deaf in East Flanders increased in the second half of the nineteenth century, to the extent that by the end of the nineteenth century more than half the deaf population resided in some kind of institution. This institutionalization may have prevented deaf men and women from having an occupation, as I suggested in Chapter 4. Many of the unemployed deaf men and women were institutionalized at the time of registration. In a similar way, institutionalization may have been a barrier preventing deaf men and women from getting married.<sup>73</sup> Because information on socio-economic status and institution-

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<sup>72</sup> Winzer, M.A. (1993) *The History of Special Education: From Isolation to Integration*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 220.

<sup>73</sup> In Chapters 6 and 7 I will show that deaf individuals were generally more likely to be institutionalized, and at a younger age than hearing individuals.

alization is missing for a considerable part of the research population, these variables could not be integrated into the multivariate models. Nonetheless, bivariate analyses enable one to uncover some distinct patterns as well.

### **Marriage and (un)employment**

Distinguishing between steady and unsteady employment is, considering the lack of continuous occupational information and vagueness of the occupations described, a daunting task. In the analysis I decided to relate civil status to socio-economic status, based on a person's highest rated occupation. If a research individual was married, the highest rated occupation before or at marriage is taken into account. Of the unmarried individuals, I selected the highest occupation recorded before the age of 50 – which is considered the end of marriageable age. I assume that a person practising a highly rated occupation, such as keeping a shop or running a farm, was less likely to be long-term unemployed and badly off financially, and was thus a more attractive marriage partner. People working in lowly rated occupations, such as unskilled labourers, are assumed to have been less eligible. The division into socio-economic groups is based on an adjustment of the SOCPO scheme, As the elite (SOCPO 5) is not represented in the database, I do not include this class in the analysis. However, I do introduce a class 0. This category consists of individuals whose highest rated occupation was “without occupation” (and who could therefore not be categorized in the existing SOCPO classes).

Table 5.10 presents the results for the first birth cohort, table 5.11 for the second birth cohort. The tables do not contain all the married and unmarried individuals because not all the individuals had an occupation that could be retrieved before/at marriage or the age of 50. Percentages for the different types of occupation are calculated in rows, according to gender and civil status. The tables thus indicate the extent to which persons within each socio-economic group were able to marry (M) or remained unmarried (UM).

Table 5.10 shows how the marriage chances of the deaf men improved when they attained a higher socio-economic status. While unemployment or an unskilled job almost always coincided with a single life, marriage prospects were better for semi-skilled, skilled and middle class workers. Marriage rates among middle class workers were somewhat lower than among skilled workers. In 5.3.2.1 I found that having a middle class father had a negative effect on the marriage chances of men. Men postponed marriage until they inherited property and, as a result, some eventually ended up renouncing marriage entirely. These unmarried middle class deaf men – and hearing men as well for that matter – may have been sons working on the farms of their fathers, whose postponement of marriage led to permanent bachelorhood.

In the hearing male cohort, the benefits of having a higher SES were less straightforward. Marriage rates were highest among skilled workers, but the marriage rates of un-

skilled workers were higher than those of semi-skilled and middle class workers. In other words, a low socio-economic status was no real impediment to marriage for hearing brothers. Moreover, the small differences between the marriage rates of the hearing men in the different socio-economic groups indicate that SES had less impact on their marriage chances.

**Table 5.10** Civil status according to SES, birth cohort 1, in % (row percentages)

SES	Deaf				Siblings			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	M	UM	M	UM	M	UM	M	UM
0. Unemployed	0	100	20	80	0	0	100	0
1. Unskilled	10	90	0	100	70.6	29.4	50	50
2. Semi-skilled	33.3	66.7	0	100	56.3	43.7	81.5	18.5
3. Skilled	60	40	0	100	83.3	16.7	100	0
4. Middle class	37.9	62.1	8.3	91.7	61.9	38.1	100	0

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Notes: for the deaf group, N= 7 men and 5 women (unemployed), 10 men and 3 women (unskilled), 15 men and 22 women (semi-skilled), 10 men and 1 woman (skilled), 29 men and 12 women (middle class); for the siblings, N= 0 men and 1 woman (unemployed), 17 men and 4 women (unskilled), 16 men and 27 women (semi-skilled), 6 men and 1 woman (skilled), 21 men and 12 women (middle class).

SES was seemingly of little importance in the female deaf cohort as deaf women from all socio-economic groups were predominantly unmarried. There is thus no indication that deaf women could improve their eligibility as a spouse by attaining a higher socio-economic status. This is perhaps less of a surprise as women were not primarily perceived as the financial providers for a household. Similarly, we find no evidence that SES affected hearing women's marriage chances. However, in contrast to the deaf women, this implies that the vast majority of hearing women, regardless of their SES, entered marriage. Marriage rates were lowest in the category of unskilled workers. As the category of unskilled women only consists of 4 women (2 married, 2 unmarried) the significance of the results for this category are debatable.

The results for the second birth cohort (table 5.11) reaffirm that unemployment had a pernicious effect on a person's marriage opportunities. In all research groups, except for the hearing sisters, unemployment went hand in hand with a single life. As more deaf men and women were unemployed, this may have been reflected in their marriage opportunities. Similar to the first birth cohort, marriage rates of deaf men were highest among skilled workers (mainly tailors and shoemakers). The overrepresentation of these occupations in urban areas may also explain why marriage rates were higher in the cities (table 5.2). However, compared to the first birth cohort, the marriage rates of skilled workers had decreased, as they did for semi-skilled and middle class workers too. The marriage rates of unskilled workers, on the other hand, went up. This development

suggests that the positive relationship between marriage prospects and SES diminished in the second half of the nineteenth century. The percentages for the hearing men reflect the general decrease in marriage frequency as the rates of unmarried men rise. As in the period before, the differences between the socio-economic groups remain limited.

In the deaf female cohort, we observe an increase in marriage rates with an increase in SES. Thus, in contrast to the first birth cohort and to the developments in the male deaf cohort, SES became more influential for deaf women in the nineteenth century. Still, the majority of the deaf women in the higher socio-economic groups remained single. Similar to the previous birth cohort, the cohort of hearing sisters showed no distinct relation between success on the marriage market and SES. Hearing women in all socio-economic groups were for the most part married.

**Table 5.11** Civil status according to SES, birth cohort 2, in % (row percentages)

SES	Deaf				Siblings			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	M	UM	M	UM	M	UM	M	UM
0.Unemployed	0	100	0	100	0	100	62.5	37.5
1.Unskilled	22.2	77.8	0	0	55	45	91.7	8.3
2.Semi-skilled	0	100	22.7	77.3	61.1	38.9	70.8	29.2
3. Skilled	41.7	58.3	22.2	77.8	50	50	75	25
4. Middle class	0	100	33.3	66.7	73.3	26.7	63.6	36.4

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Notes: for the deaf group, N= 16 men and 17 women (unemployed), 9 men and 0 women (unskilled), 8 men and 22 women (semi-skilled), 24 men and 9 women (skilled), 8 men and 3 women (middle class); for the siblings, N= 3 men and 8 women (unemployed), 20 men and 12 women (unskilled), 18 men and 24 women (semi-skilled), 10 men and 4 women (skilled), 15 men and 11 women (middle class).

Based on these tables, I conclude that a deaf person's socio-economic status, especially in the case of men, influenced their success on the marriage market to some extent. Most deaf men and women who entered married life practised more highly rated occupations, mainly in crafts or trade and transport. In contrast, deaf men and women without an occupation or working as unskilled labourers had the lowest marriage rates. Regardless of the SES, however, the deaf in each socio-economic group were mostly unmarried. Moreover, the much higher marriage rates in the hearing population in the equivalent socio-economic groups indicate that a person's employment was not the only important factor on the marriage market. While having steady employment could enhance the marriage prospects of deaf men and women, their generally low marriage rates indicate that other barriers were at work as well. Hearing men and women from all socio-economic groups were most likely to get married, and a higher SES did not result in a proportionally higher rate of marriage.

## Marriage and institutionalization

By interacting institutionalization with civil status, I aim to analyse whether a person who experienced institutionalization during adulthood was more often unmarried than a person who did not reside in an institution.

The decision to only look at institutionalization during adulthood implies that I am not taking into account whether deaf individuals attended a boarding school as children. Previously, I suggested that a deaf person who had enjoyed an education was more socially adjusted and thus better able to make social contact (section 4.4). As such, we may assume that education improved their position on the marriage market. Indeed, it can be assumed that without the opportunity to attend a deaf school, deaf children lived a more isolated life in their parental households. In contrast, deaf schools provided deaf pupils with the opportunities to develop communication skills and to meet other deaf people. However, the unilateral presence in the research population of educated men and women (95.5 percent of the deaf women and 87.2 percent of the men were educated) prevents us from testing the effect of education on civil status. Moreover, information on the level of education of the hearing siblings is unavailable, which prevents a reliable comparison. For these reasons, institutionalization related to education is not taken into account. The low marriage numbers of the educated men and women suggest, nonetheless, that the influence of schooling on civil status was limited. As institutionalization after a person's marriageable period is of no interest either, people who only started living in an institution after the age of 50 are left out as well. In concrete terms, the focus on adult institutionalization implies looking at persons who were institutionalized between the ages of 20 and 50.<sup>74</sup>

The analysis is hampered by a problematic lack of residential data for a large proportion of the research population, especially in the first birth cohort. Before the introduction of population registers, a person's address was generally only recorded at the time of their birth, marriage or death. The living arrangements of a person in between these events were not recorded and thus untraceable. So for many of the unmarried individuals I only know where they were born and died, and residential information from their adult life is absent. In the second birth cohort as well, residential information is often incomplete due to the absence or incompleteness of population registers. This lack of data means that I can only distinguish between those who were definitely institutional-

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<sup>74</sup> Previously, I calculated that pupils in the deaf schools of Ghent were on average around 18 years old when they left school – much older than the general non-disabled population (2.1.1.4 and 2.1.1.5). To exclude educational institutionalization from the analysis, the analysis starts at age 20. Deaf men and women still residing in a deaf school after that age can no longer be considered students, but residents of the institution.

ized and those for whom it is unknown. For 66 of the 284 deaf individuals (23.2 percent) in the dataset, I am certain that between the ages of 20 and 50 they were institutionalized at some stage. There were 6 persons from the first birth cohort (of the remaining 133 men and women it is only known that they were not institutionalized at the time of marriage or death) and 60 persons from the second (the remaining 85 individuals were never recorded in an institution in the available sources). In the hearing population, 11 men and women (3.9 percent) were recorded residing in an institution between the ages of 20 and 50.

**Table 5.12** Institutionalization (20-50 years) and civil status, in % and years<sup>75</sup>

N=	Deaf		Siblings	
	Institution 66	Unknown 218	Institution 11	Unknown 273
<i>Married</i>	3	21.1	45.5	68.1
Age (M)	-	-	44.6	-
Age (Md)	-	-	44.4	-
<i>Unmarried</i>	97	78.9	54.5	31.9
Age (M)	33.5	-	24.2	-
Age (Md)	33.2	-	24	-
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Table 5.12 shows that only two of the 66 institutionalized deaf men and women (3 percent) were married. Jean Francois Tielemans, born in Sint-Niklaas in 1842, resided in the deaf school of the Brothers of Charity in Ghent until the age of 24. He later married Marie Josepha Pennequin, 16 years his junior (date unknown). Based on the age of his much younger wife, we can deduce that many years passed between his institutionalization and entry into married life, providing him with enough time to find a spouse. August De Nagel remained in the school of the Brothers of Charity in Ghent after graduation and worked there as a servant until he was 37. On February 12, 1892 he moved and set up a one-person household. Fourteen days later, he married a deaf-mute woman who was living in with her mother. Seven months later, on October 13, she moved in with August. The remaining 64 institutionalized deaf men and women (97 percent) remained single their whole lives. Calculations show that the unmarried men and women

<sup>75</sup> The mean (M) and median (Md) age mentioned in the table represent the mean and median age of being recorded in an institution. As a result, the cells of the individuals with an unknown status are left blank. If a person was recorded institutionalised at multiple points in time, I took into calculation the different ages at institutionalisation.

who were institutionalized were about 33 when they entered an institution for the first time. In other words, they were institutionalized at a considerably young age, well before the end of their marriageable years (and the average age at marriage, see 5.3.1.2). In Chapter 7, I will show that institutionalization was permanent in most cases.

Of the 218 deaf individuals for whom it is uncertain whether they were institutionalized, 46 married in the course of their lives (21.1 percent). If we only take into account the second birth cohort in which the distinction between those who were institutionalized and those who were not is more reliable, this rate increases to 22.4 percent. Although the results are tentative, they suggest that institutionalization had a distinct negative effect on the marriage opportunities of the deaf. Institutionalization among the hearing siblings aged between 20 and 50 was rare (3.9 percent), and only occurred at death. Five of the 11 institutionalized siblings were married. Institutionalized at an average age of 44.6 (median 44.4), they were all residing in an institution after marriage. The remaining 6 unmarried siblings died in an institution at an average age of 24.3 (median 24) – well before the average age at marriage.

The much higher marriage rates among the individuals who were probably not institutionalized between the ages of 20 and 50 suggest that institutionalization represented an important barrier in the marriage opportunities of deaf people. Nonetheless, the vast majority of the non-institutionalized deaf remained permanently single as well (78.9 percent). Institutionalization can thus only partially account for the low marriage rates in the deaf population.

### **Marriage opportunities for the deaf: all the same?**

The previous analyses have identified several characteristics, in addition to the presence of a hearing impairment, which influenced deaf people's marriage opportunities. In table 5.13, I sum up these characteristics. The table consists of three columns. The first contains a description of the variable of interest. The second column, *total deaf population*, displays the percentage of deaf people within each category who were marriage (M) or remained unmarried (UM). For example, 16.2 percent of the deaf individuals with an unskilled father entered married life. The remaining 83.8 percent of the deaf with an unskilled father remained unmarried. Percentages are thus calculated in each subcategory (row percentages). The third column, *married deaf population*, gives the distribution over the different categories for the married deaf population alone. The percentages are thus calculated for each covariate (column percentages). For example, 12.5 percent of the 48 married individuals had an unskilled father.

**Table 5.13** Characteristics married deaf population, in %

	Total deaf population (N=284)			Married deaf population (N=48)
	M	UM	%	%
<b>SES father</b>				
Unskilled	16.2	83.8	100	12.5
(Semi-)skilled	21.9	78.1	100	43.8
Middle class	14.4	85.6	100	35.4
Unknown	12.5	87.5	100	8.3
%				100
<b>SES</b>				
Unemployed	2.2	97.8	100	2.1
Unskilled	13	87	100	6.3
(Semi-)skilled	25.2	74.8	100	58.3
Middle class	25	75	100	27.1
Unknown	-			6.2
%				100
<b>Institutionalized</b>				
Yes	3	97	100	4.2
No	21.1	78.9	100	95.8
%				100
<b>Residences</b>				
Urban stayer	20.6	79.4	100	31.3
Rural stayer	19.6	80.4	100	47.9
Migrant	8.4	91.6	100	20.8
%				100
<b>Birth rank</b>				
First child	13.4	86.6	100	18.8
Second child	20.3	79.7	100	27.1
Third child	26.2	73.8	100	22.9
Higher	13.5	86.5	100	31.3
%				100
<b>District</b>				
Aalst	15.7	84.3	100	16.7
Dendermonde	11.4	88.6	100	8.3
Eeklo	42.9	57.1	100	12.5
Ghent	14.8	85.2	100	35.4
Oudenaarde	8.1	91.9	100	6.3
Sint-Niklaas	32.3	67.7	100	20.8
%				100

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Table 5.13 illustrates that some deaf individuals were more likely to enter marriage than others. Marriage rates were highest among deaf individuals having a semi-skilled or skilled father, and among those who were (semi-)skilled workers themselves. While this



was no different in the hearing cohorts, the difference in marriage rates between, on the one hand, the unemployed and unskilled and, on the other, the (semi-)skilled was much more marked in the deaf population. This observation suggests that in the general population SES was of minor importance (as the majority in each category entered marriage), whereas having a hearing impairment together with a low socio-economic status resulted in very low marriage opportunities. Having a skilled job could somewhat improve a deaf person's marriage eligibility. More deaf individuals who were born and residing in an urban town entered marriage, especially in comparison to migrants. The urban marriage market seems to have been more open-minded and accessible to deaf men and women, especially in the course of the nineteenth century. However, the beneficial effect of urbanization was undone if a person lived in an institution. Being institutionalized during adulthood reduced a person's marriage opportunities immensely. The segregative and often gender-specific character of the institutions may account for this fall-off. It is difficult to draw any conclusions based on birth rank. The multivariate analysis indicated that second and third born children had a significantly higher chance of marrying than firstborn children, and this was reflected to a lesser extent in the hearing population (insignificantly higher). Finally, deaf individuals living in the polder districts of Eeklo and Sint-Niklaas were more likely to marry than those living in sandy areas. In the second half of the nineteenth century in particular, marriage numbers were very low in districts characterized by a commercial survival economy in crisis. The low marriage rates suggest that the deaf in particular were susceptible to periods of crisis, compared to the hearing cohort in which the distribution was more equal.

Josine Catherine Ghislaine Cnudde, Charlotte Jeanne Drubbel and Joseph Louis Schiets were the only deaf urban skilled workers, born as a second or third child of a (semi-)skilled father, who experienced no institutionalization. All were married. The life courses of these individuals suggest that a certain life trajectory could help deaf individuals to overcome the barriers they faced on the marriage market. Although some characteristics seem to be either more advantageous or detrimental to the marriage opportunities of a deaf person, the generally low marriage rates nevertheless indicate that it was difficult to overcome the restrictions that an impairment imposed on a person's marriage opportunities.

### **5.3.3 Summary**

From the end of the eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth century, deaf individuals encountered more difficulties in finding a marriage partner compared to individuals without a disability. The number of deaf persons marrying was low, and those who did marry were considerably older and more often married an unequal spouse. In the course of the nineteenth century, the number of deaf men who entered marriage de-

creased from 29.4 percent to about 16.5 percent. However, this decline cannot be attributed solely to industrialization. A comparison of the probability of marriage according to the level of industrialization shows that living in an industrial city even contributed to the marriage opportunities of deaf men. This can probably be explained by the fact that most industrial towns were urbanized regions. I have argued that cities were more accustomed to disabled individuals and provided more opportunities for deaf people to meet through education and recreation. The marriage rates of deaf women, on the other hand, went up in the second half of the nineteenth century from 3.7 percent to 12.1 percent. There is no clear indication as to why deaf women were more successful on the nineteenth-century marriage market. Despite the increase, marriage rates of deaf women remained very low in comparison to the hearing population.

Through multivariate and bivariate analyses, I have identified several life characteristics that affected the marriage chances of the deaf in positive and negative ways. Living a migratory life as well as being institutionalized almost always led to a permanently single life, as did unemployment and coming from a middle class family. On the other hand, being employed in a more steady (semi-)skilled job or living in the city or a polder district led to higher marriage rates. While some features may have enhanced the marriage prospects of deaf men and women, their much lower marriage rates compared to the hearing population with similar life trajectories indicate that there were also other barriers. On an individual level, the deaf were undoubtedly disadvantaged by their difficulties in communicating with the hearing. This barrier between the deaf and hearing may have encouraged deaf individuals to look for a spouse who was deaf as well. However, several structural factors complicated this search. The number of deaf individuals was low and they were spread over a large area. Before the establishment of deaf schools and the development of a deaf community with their own clubs, newspapers, etc. the activities for deaf people were limited and opportunities to meet other deaf individuals were scarce. Although the situation improved in the course of the nineteenth century, the increased residential segregation that came with the increased institutionalization of the deaf made marriage less of an option. On a group level, deaf people may have avoided or were forced to refrain from marriage because of the negative attitudes of their environment. In this regard, I have mentioned how the ideas of eugenics in the nineteenth century started debates about the hereditariness of deafness.

## 5.4 Fertility behaviour of the deaf

In this section I discuss the parenthood characteristics of the 239 married persons and 25 single mothers. As the number of deaf marriages is low and most of the children of the deaf parent(s) were born before the start of the fertility decline in Belgium, there was little possibility of examining the impact of the fertility transition on the reproductive behaviour of the deaf. Nonetheless, my ambition to uncover the personal living experiences of the deaf means it would be interesting to take a look at the familial characteristics of the deaf parents.

Based on the vital registration data, I retrieved information on the births of 1173 children, born to 212 deaf and hearing persons in the dataset. The information regarding the children was assembled in the *parenthood* subfile of the *research individual file* in the database (2.2.1.1). In reconstructing the parenthood characteristics of the research population, I only registered the children of the research subjects themselves. In other words, if a person married a spouse who had conceived children in a previous marriage, these children were not taken into consideration. In the analysis I distinguish between children born out of wedlock (5.4.1), children from first marriages (5.4.2) and children born in subsequent marriages (5.4.3). The majority of the children in the dataset were born in first marriages, as shown in table 5.14.

**Table 5.14** Children born out of wedlock, in first and subsequent marriages, according to birth cohort, in %<sup>76</sup>

	Birth cohort 1		Birth cohort 2	
	Deaf 112	Siblings 507	Deaf 78	Siblings 476
Out-of-wedlock	5.4	2.6	5.2	3.6
First marriage	84.8	91.3	85.9	87.6
Subsequent marriages	9.8	6.1	9	8.8
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

<sup>76</sup> Table 5.14 takes into account the children of the male and female research individuals. As only the identity of the mother is certain in the case of illegitimate children, only the children of the research women are counted in the first category of out of wedlock.

### 5.4.1 Extramarital births

The illegitimacy rates in table 5.14 indicate that the number of children born out of wedlock was higher for deaf mothers. Still, the illegitimacy rate among the deaf women was not exceptionally high in comparison with regional and national averages at the time. In the period under observation, national illegitimacy rates varied from 5 percent in rural areas to 12 percent in cities.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, as some women gave birth to more than one illegitimate child it is more revealing to determine the percentages of single mothers instead of illegitimate children. About 6 percent of all deaf women gave birth to an illegitimate child compared to 14 percent of the hearing women. It was thus more common for hearing women to engage in extramarital sex – or at least to become pregnant out of wedlock. Previously, I argued that deaf women were perceived as being less sexually attractive and less destined for a life of matrimony. This was confirmed by the low marriage frequencies of deaf women. One consequence is that they were probably less involved in courtship relations and thus had fewer opportunities to become pregnant outside marriage.

Besides the difference in the frequency of single motherhood, other differences become apparent between deaf and hearing single mothers. Maria Van Hoogendorp was born deaf in the rural village of Kruibeke in 1807. In 1829, at the age of 21, she gave birth to an illegitimate son Benedictus. Twenty months later, she was delivered of an illegitimate daughter Rosalie. Both children were born in the house of Maria's parents. In 1842, the 35-year-old Maria gave birth to a third child out of wedlock. Maria was at the time still living in her parental house together with her two children and widowed mother. Five days after the birth of her third child her mother died. The next time Maria appears in the sources is at the death of her youngest child in 1844. At the time, she was living together with her widowed brother Charles Louis. Maria spent the final years of her life, until her death in 1868, living in the household of her illegitimate daughter Rosalie. Maria always lived together with family and never got married.

The story of Maria was not exceptional for deaf single mothers: 83 percent of all deaf single mothers never married. Among the hearing single mothers, on the other hand, it was uncommon to remain single: 94 percent of the hearing single mothers married after an average of 6 years (median 2.6 years) after the birth of their (first) illegitimate child. This observation is consistent with previous research that shows that the marriage

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<sup>77</sup> All illegitimate births took place between 1794 and 1895. From the 1880s onwards, national illegitimacy rates started dropping by over 50 percent. Shorter, E., Knodel, J. & Van de Walle, E. (1971) "The Decline of Non-Marital Fertility in Europe, 1880-1940" *Population Studies*, 35/3, 375-93; De Langhe, S., Mechant, M. & Devos, I. (2011) "Regionale verschillen in het leven van ongehuwde moeders", 2-28.

chances of unmarried mothers were comparable to those of other women.<sup>78</sup> Deaf women appear to have deviated from this pattern. Several factors may have reduced the chances of deaf single women to marry after giving birth out of wedlock.

The difference in marriage rates may relate to the age at which the single mothers gave birth to their illegitimate child. The hearing women were on average 23 (median 22) at childbirth, well before the average age of marriage. So they were left with sufficient time to persuade the father of their child to marry them or to find another suitable spouse. The deaf single mothers were considerably older as they were on average 28 (median 25) when they had their child.<sup>79</sup> Previous research confirms that older single mothers had less bargaining power on the marriage market and were more likely to be abandoned.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, Sofie De Langhe has shown that a woman's marriage chances were negatively influenced by the death of her father. In regions with fewer opportunities for women to earn an independent living, such as in polder areas, the death of a father also meant the loss of important bargaining power.<sup>81</sup> Thus, as the deaf women were generally older when they had an illegitimate child, the probability that their father had died was higher. Indeed, in 42.8 percent of the cases the father of the deaf single mothers was no longer present. For example, the deaf Marie Becque had lost both parents and all but one of her siblings by the age of 22. So she probably had few people to help her persuade the father of her illegitimate daughter Marie Joanna to marry her. However, having a living father was not always enough. If the father was not living nearby his influence was probably limited, as the story of the deaf Anna Catharina Straetman suggests. Anna Catharina, born in Sint-Gillis in 1787, was living in Sint-Amands in the province of Antwerp when she gave birth to an illegitimate child in 1820. According to the birth certificate, at the time she was living together with Joannes Baptist Saerens, a 37-year-old unmarried weaver. Was she co-habiting with this man and was he the father of her son? Or did she work as a maidservant in his house and become the subject of his advances? We can only guess at her story. However, what is certain is that Anna Catharina was unable to convince the father of her child to marry her. Perhaps abandoned to her fate and unable to provide for herself and her child, she returned to the house of her parents in Sint-Gillis a year later. In contrast, all but one hearing single mothers were

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<sup>78</sup> De Langhe, S., Mechant, M. & Devos, I. (2011) "Regionale verschillen in het leven van ongehuwde moeders", 21-3.

<sup>79</sup> The age at childbirth for women who had their first child out of wedlock was always lower than for the entire population. The non-deaf women were on average 27.9 (median 26.7) at the birth of their first child (total non-deaf female population). Deaf women were on average 29.9 (median 29.2) (total deaf female population).

<sup>80</sup> Alter, G. (1988) *Family and the Female Life Course. The Women of Verviers, Belgium, 1849-1880*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 127.

<sup>81</sup> De Langhe, S. (2013) *Oude vrijsters: bestaansstrategieën van ongehuwde vrouwen op het Brugse platteland, late achttiende eeuw-begin negentiende eeuw*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished PhD dissertation), 391-2.

living in the parental household when they gave birth, and in 77.8 percent of the cases a father was present who could enhance the bargaining power of his unmarried daughter, both socially and economically.

In addition, communication difficulties probably hindered deaf women from mobilizing the community to persuade the fathers to marry. Moreover, as deaf-muteness was for a long time associated with feeble-mindedness and the perception prevailed that people with disabilities should not marry, it was perhaps more accepted for men to abandon the deaf women they had seduced. Faced with low marriage opportunities, deaf women may have been persuaded into sexual relationships with false promises of marriage, after which they were left to their fate. According to historian George Alter, women who lacked economic and social resources were indeed “*more likely to be exploited, and possibly more likely to deceive themselves about the level of commitment their partners felt toward them*”.<sup>82</sup>

While deaf single mothers seem to have been socially disadvantaged when it came to persuading the fathers to marry them, we find no distinct differences in the economic resources of the deaf and hearing single mothers. In 18 of the birth certificates of the illegitimate children an occupation was recorded for the single mothers. For 7 more mothers, I found an occupation in a population register covering the period of the childbirth or in the death certificate of the child when it died shortly after birth. Based on these sources, it appears that most deaf and hearing single mothers were working as spinners and unskilled labourers. Yet, the overrepresentation of these types of occupations among the single mothers should not be interpreted as an indication of a higher vulnerability of women in these particular occupations. De Langhe, Mechant and Devos have shown how the occupations of single mothers reflect the general occupational structure of unmarried women in a region.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, the single mothers who were spinners lived in rural towns in which spinning was the most common occupation for younger women. The unskilled female labourers lived in cities such as Ghent and Sint-Niklaas, dominated by unskilled labour for youngsters.

Instead of merely portraying the single mothers as *victims* of predatory men, we can also ask whether women may have played a more active role when engaging in extramarital sex. Sociologist Jan Van Bavel has suggested that women may have used extramarital

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<sup>82</sup> Alter, G. (1988) *Family and the Female Life Course*, 139. Vandenbroeke agrees that single mothers were mostly women who were tricked into sexual activities by the promise of marriage. Vandenbroeke, C. (1979) “Het seksueel gedrag der jongeren in Vlaanderen sinds de late 16de eeuw” *Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis*, 62, 201-4.

<sup>83</sup> De Langhe, S., Mechant, M., & Devos, I. (2011) “Regionale verschillen in het leven van ongehuwde moeders”, 12.

sexual contact to force a man into marriage.<sup>84</sup> Becoming pregnant out of wedlock may have been an attempt by deaf women to increase their marriage chances by trapping a man into marriage through pregnancy. The higher age at childbirth among the deaf women may reflect their eagerness to find a man before time ran out. According to Alter, when engaging in premarital sex, every woman had to weigh the risk of remaining a spinster against the risk of becoming an unwed mother. However, the risks were higher for those considered less attractive on the marriage market. The people regarded as being less suitable as a spouse, economically and socially, “*had to take greater risks in courtship, and [...] could have less confidence that a partner would marry.*”<sup>85</sup> For most hearing women the assessment of risks turned out positive as extramarital pregnancies and births were generally followed by marriage. 35 hearing women conceived a child outside marriage. For 17 women the pregnancy was followed by marriage before the birth of the child.<sup>86</sup> The other 18 women became single mothers, but eventually all but one married later in life. For the deaf women the outcome was more often negative. Of the 8 deaf women who became pregnant out of wedlock, only one married before giving birth. One other married shortly after childbirth. Nathalie De Rijcke, born deaf in Mullem in 1843, gave birth to her daughter Marie Adolphine in April 1865, only 57 days after she got married to Augustus Buckens. Perhaps the fact that she became pregnant out of wedlock at a young age and still had both her parents increased her bargaining power in the marriage negotiations. Josine Catherine Ghislaine Cnudde, a deaf woman born in Geraardsbergen in 1844, became a single mother in August 1870. Less than a year later, she married the 7-year younger deaf man Hernestus Duwyn, who acknowledged the child to be his in the marriage certificate. After marriage, Josine Catherine gave birth to seven more children. The remaining 6 unwed mothers remained single their entire lives. All of them spent their lives in the households of others, mostly close relatives such as a widowed parent and siblings, but some in unrelated families as well.

Yet, even when an extramarital pregnancy did not result in marriage, we may suppose that some women preferred unwed motherhood as an alternative to spinsterhood without children.<sup>87</sup> The economic support a child could provide in later years may have been sufficient motivation for some women to take the risk of becoming pregnant while single. The low employment rates of deaf women may possibly have played a role in such decisions.

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<sup>84</sup> Van Bavel, J. (2001) “Family Control, Bridal Pregnancy, and Illegitimacy. An Event History Analysis in Leuven, Belgium, 1846-1856” *Social Science History*, 25/3, 469.

<sup>85</sup> Alter, G. (1988) *Family and the Female Life Course*, 121.

<sup>86</sup> Children born within eight months of marriage are considered to be pre-maritally conceived.

<sup>87</sup> Alter, G. (1988) *Family and the Female Life Course*, 140.

## 5.4.2 Marital fertility

The majority of the children were born in the first marriages of the 48 deaf and 191 hearing research subjects. Table 5.15 presents the percentages of individuals according to the number of children born in the first marriage. The table presents two percentages in each category. The first column (*all*) takes into account all married individuals regardless of the time during which the individuals were under observation. These percentages thus also take into account families in which the reproductive behaviour was disturbed by events such as the premature death of one or both spouses. The second column (*full*) takes into account all married individuals whose life courses could be reconstructed from marriage until the female spouse reached the age of at least 50 – 50 is considered the end of the reproductive period. The second column thus only takes into account the 28 married deaf persons and 103 hearing individuals with a complete reproductive history. The *full* column excludes 21 deaf persons and 88 siblings who migrated out of the region, lost their spouse or died themselves before the bride's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday (*right censoring*).

**Table 5.15** Number of children born in first marriages according to birth cohort, in %

N=	Birth cohort 1				Birth cohort 2			
	Deaf		Siblings		Deaf		Siblings	
	All	Full	All	Full	All	Full	All	Full
	27	20	101	58	21	9	90	50
None	29.6	25	11.9	10.3	28.6	22.2	13.4	10
1 child	11.2	5	6.9	6.9	4.7	11.1	10	10
2-5 children	33.3	45	40.6	32.8	28.6	33.3	34.4	34
6-9 children	14.8	10	27.7	36.2	14.3	22.2	24.4	26
+10 children	11.1	15	9.9	13.8	9.5	11.1	12.2	20
Unknown	0	0	3	0	14.3	0	5.6	0
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Table 5.15 shows that in the total married population (*all*), it was much more common for deaf individuals in both birth cohorts to be childless or to have fewer children. Over one-fourth of the deaf in both birth cohorts had no children, compared to less than one in six hearing couples. Large families (more than 5 children) were also more common among the hearing. While families of six or more children constituted about 25 percent of the deaf cohorts, about 37 percent of the hearing research individuals had a large family. As I am taking into account all married individuals, the differences in family size may have been the result of a higher mortality rate in the deaf marriages or a higher



rate of out-migration. As a result, a higher proportion of deaf couples may not have been able to make the most of their reproductive opportunities, which led to a lower number of children. However, if I only take into account the research individuals with a complete reproductive history (*full*) we find a similar pattern. Large households made up 25 and 30 percent in the first and second deaf birth cohort, while respectively 50 percent and 46 percent of the hearing siblings had six or more children. The average number of children in the deaf cohorts was 3.9 (median 3)<sup>88</sup>, compared to 5.6 (median 5) in the hearing cohorts<sup>89</sup>.

In six of the deaf couples, the marriage was childless. In a period in which couples could only resort to ineffectual contraceptive methods such as coitus interruptus or periodic abstinence, being childless was less of an option than it is today. However, factors such as health problems, infertility and the prolonged absence of a partner could reduce the number of children. Jean Baptiste Caelendries, born deaf in Temse in 1786, married the 22-year younger maidservant Cecilia Apers in 1832. Although they remained married until his death in 1852, the population registers of 1830-1837 and 1847-1856 reported that Jean Baptiste lived on his own in his house in Hoogkameren. The large age gap between the spouses and the separate living situation makes it unlikely that the marriage was based on love or that there were many opportunities for Cecilia to become pregnant. In 1885, the deaf Leonie Goethals married the deaf Emile Vandervennet. In the population register of 1910-1920 it was reported that Leonie and Emile lived “temporarily separated from each other”. Although Leonie had passed her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday by then, the separation may indicate an unhappy marriage, which in turn may have decreased intimacy between the couple.

While the absence of the partner or having an unsuccessful marriage may explain the small family size of some couples, a more important explanation for the higher frequency of childlessness and small families in the deaf couples relates to the age at marriage. The higher the age at marriage, the shorter the reproductive period. In 5.3.1 I showed that the deaf were on average 5.8 years (median 6.6 years) older when entering married life. For the study of reproductive behaviour, however, the age of the female spouse is most important as the fertile period of women is more limited. Therefore I have calculated the average age at first marriage based on the ages of the female research individuals and, in the case of male research individuals, of their brides. The women in the deaf marriages with a complete reproductive history were on average

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<sup>88</sup> First birth cohort: 3.9 births on average (median 3 births). Second birth cohort: 4 births on average (median 3 births).

<sup>89</sup> First birth cohort: 5.3 births on average (median 5.5 births). Second birth cohort: 5.8 births on average (median 5 births).

aged 30.5 (median 29.9) in the first birth cohort and 27.6 (median 29.1) in the second.<sup>90</sup> The brides in the hearing couples were on average aged respectively 28.1 (median 26.5) and 28.1 (median 26.8).<sup>91</sup> These mean and especially median ages confirm that the brides among the deaf couples were older when they married. Subsequently, the duration of the marital reproductive period was shorter.<sup>92</sup> Francisca De Clercq was almost 47 years old when she married the 8-year older deaf man Jacques De Bruyne. It is no surprise that the couple remained childless. Hearing parents were younger than deaf parents at first marriage, giving them 2 additional years in which to conceive children. This difference may account for the birth of one extra child on average.

#### 5.4.2.1 ‘Spacing’ and ‘stopping’

In the discussion of family size and limitation, it is customary to address the *spacing* and *stopping* behaviour of both cohorts. Historical fertility research has acknowledged two strategies for couples to limit their fertility, known as birth spacing and stopping. Spacing refers to the reproductive behaviour in which a couple tries to lengthen the interval between subsequent births to reduce the number of children. When a couple tries to prevent further reproduction after the maximum desired number of children has been born, one speaks of stopping behaviour.<sup>93</sup> Spacing behaviour can be roughly measured by calculating the average length of childbirth intervals, and stopping by examining the average age of the mother at the birth of the last child. Couples who have a larger family size can be presumed to have had shorter birth intervals on average and a higher age at last birth. Spacing and stopping are often intertwined as a declining age at last birth not only reflects stopping behaviour, but is often also the outcome of spacing, as spacing implies the increase of birth intervals in general, including the last open interval.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> These numbers are based on the marriage ages of respectively 47 and 47 brides. The marriage ages of 9 women in the first birth cohort and 2 women in the second birth cohort are unknown as the date of marriage and/or date of birth of the spouse is unknown.

<sup>91</sup> These numbers are based on the marriage ages of respectively 12 and 10 brides. The marriage ages of 8 women in the first birth cohort are unknown as the date of marriage and/or date of birth of the spouse is unknown

<sup>92</sup> The average duration of marital fertility in the deaf cohorts, assuming that a woman could give birth until the age of 50, was 19.7 years (median 20.3 years) compared to 21.2 years (median 22.8 years) in the non-deaf cohorts.

<sup>93</sup> Van Bavel, J. (2004) “Detecting Stopping and Spacing Behavior in Historical Demography. A Critical Review of Methods” *Population*, 59/1, 117-28.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibidem*.

Stopping in particular, but also spacing behaviour has been attributed an important role in the fertility transition which started in Belgium from the 1880s onward. However, even before the start of the transition the number of births was liable to different factors. According to Ansley J. Coale, the number of births in marriage before the transition was influenced by what he called “*parity independent*” factors. The number of children may have been lower due to a decreasing coital frequency after several years of marriage, religious prescriptions prohibiting sex during Lent, Advent, Sundays and holy days, the temporary absence of the husband, health problems and breastfeeding practices.<sup>95</sup> So even in the absence of deliberate spacing and stopping efforts, interbirth intervals could vary widely between population groups. In the fertility transition, states Coale, reproductive behaviour became increasingly driven by “*parity dependent*” ways of family limitation: couples *intentionally* ended their reproduction when their family reached the desired size by making use of withdrawal, contraceptives or abortion.<sup>96</sup> Several scholars have suggested that couples were trying to intentionally limit their family size even before the fertility transition. Van Bavel and Kok have shown that in the period 1820-1885 lower class Dutch families deliberately increased their birth intervals to help relieve the burden of too many young and dependent children.<sup>97</sup> Scholars point to the methods of withdrawal, abstinence or conscious prolongation of the lactation period to achieve this goal.

In the analysis of the spacing and stopping behaviour of the research individuals, I only take into account the research individuals with a full reproductive history who had at least one child during their (first) marriage. Of the right-censored research individuals, it is uncertain whether they had more children after the end of observation, which may lead to an underestimation of the age at last childbirth.

As the second birth cohort approaches and partly coincides with the start of the fertility transition, it can be assumed that spacing and stopping behaviour occurred more in the second birth cohort. However, the analysis revealed no distinct differences in the lengths of the birth intervals and ages at last childbirth between the two birth cohorts. As the subject pool is quite small, I have chosen to combine the results for the two birth

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<sup>95</sup> Breastfeeding could lead to temporary sterility; Kintner, H.J. (1987) “The Impact of Breastfeeding Patterns on Regional Differences in Infant Mortality in Germany, 1910” *European Journal of Population*, 3, 233-61.

<sup>96</sup> Based on: Coale, A.J. (1986) “The Decline of Fertility in Europe Since the 18th Century as a Chapter in Demographic History” In: Coale, A.J. and Watkins, S.C. (eds.) *The Decline of Fertility in Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1-30; Matthys, C. (2012) *Sex and the City*, 22-24; McDonald, P. (1984) *Nuptiality and Completed Fertility: A Study of Starting, Stopping and Spacing Behavior*. Netherlands: International Statistical Institute (World Fertility Survey Comparative Studies 35).

<sup>97</sup> Van Bavel, J. & Kok, J. (2004) “Birth Spacing in the Netherlands. The Effects of Family Composition, Occupation and Religion on Birth Intervals, 1820-1885” *European Journal of Population*, 20/2, 119-40.

cohorts in table 5.16. The table displays the mean and median interval between marriage and first birth (in months), between the subsequent births (in months) and the mean and median age of the mother at last childbirth (in years). The ‘N’ column gives the number of cases taken into consideration.<sup>98</sup>

Comparing the mean and median birth intervals, table 5.16 provides no indication of different spacing behaviour in the deaf and hearing households. The mean birth interval between marriage and the birth of the first child indicates that deaf couples gave birth to their first child about 15 months after marriage. Thus more quickly after marriage than the hearing couples, who had their first child after about 17 months. However, looking at the median, the differences disappear: both the deaf and the siblings experienced family expansion within about 11 months after marriage. Both in the sibling and deaf cohorts, subsequent children were born 27 months apart on average. There is a slight difference in favour of a longer interval in the deaf cohorts when looking at the median. Nonetheless, a distribution of 27 months between consecutive births can still be considered natural child spacing, taking into account several months of breastfeeding and a subsequent pregnancy of nine months.<sup>99</sup> The mothers in the deaf and hearing households were both about 40 years old on average when they gave birth to their last child.

**Table 5.16** Birth intervals (months) and age of mother at last child (years) of the individuals with a full reproductive history, in months and years

	Deaf			Siblings		
	M	Md	N	M	Md	N
Interval Marriage – first birth (months)	15.1	11.1	21	17.8	11	91
Interval Subsequent births (months)	27.6	27.1	95	27	24.7	496
Age at last child (years)	40.4	41.8	15	40.3	40.6	90

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

The results based on table 5.16 do not indicate that the deaf couples used more effective fertility control than hearing couples, nor can the figures for stopping or spacing account for the lower family sizes among the deaf. As the deaf and hearing research individuals in the dataset belong to the same parental families, the same socio-economic group and live in the same period and region, they can be assumed to share similar be-

<sup>98</sup> The number of cases corresponds to the number of research individuals in the calculation of the first birth interval and the age at final birth. With regard to the interval between subsequent births, ‘N’ refers to the number of births between which the interval could be calculated.

<sup>99</sup> Matthijs, K. (2001) *De mateloze negentiende eeuw. Bevolking, huwelijk, gezin en sociale verandering*. Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 102-3.

liefs and practices relating to reproduction, such as the duration of breastfeeding and the observation of religious prescriptions. So it is no surprise that the reproductive behaviour of the deaf and their siblings was similar.

### 5.4.3 Remarriage

About 9 percent of the children of a deaf parent and about 7 percent of the children born to hearing parents were born in a second or third marriage.

Table 5.17 provides an overview of the reasons first marriages ended and the incidence of remarriage. In the Early Modern Period and the nineteenth century, divorce was rare and almost every marriage ended because of the death of a spouse.<sup>100</sup> As life expectancy was generally lower, the marriage market was regularly replenished with relatively young widow(er)s looking to marry a second spouse. Previous research has shown that 20 to 25 percent of the marriages in the Early Modern Period were a second or third marriage. However, from the second half of the nineteenth century and in particular from the 1880s onwards remarriages became less common. Koen Matthys has explained this downward trend by the emergence of a more romantic and emotional conception of marriage.<sup>101</sup>

**Table 5.17** End of first marriage according to birth cohort, in %

	Birth cohort 1				Birth cohort 2			
	Deaf		Siblings		Deaf		Siblings	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
N=	25	2	51	50	13	8	42	48
Spouse dies	48	100	47	46	46.2	37.5	31	52
Remarriage	41.7	50	50	4.3	50	0	61.5	16
Widowhood	58.3	50	50	95.7	50	100	38.5	84
%	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Research person dies	52	0	51	52	30.8	37.5	45.2	33.3
Unknown	0	0	2	2	23	25	23.8	16.7
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

<sup>100</sup> Van Poppel, F. (1992) *Trouwen in Nederland. Een historisch-demografische studie van de 19<sup>de</sup>- en vroeg- 20<sup>ste</sup> eeuw*. The Hague: Nederlands Interdisciplinair Demografisch instituut, 275; Knodel, J. & Lynch, K. (1985) "The Decline of Remarriage: Evidence From German Village Populations in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries" *Journal of Family History*, 10/1, 37; Matthys, K. (1986) *Hertrouw in België. Sociaal-demografisch profiel*. Leuven: Sociologisch Onderzoeksinstituut, 7.

<sup>101</sup> Matthijs, K. (2001) *De mateloze negentiende eeuw*, 198-9.

In about half of all deaf and hearing marriages the first marriage ended because of the death of the spouse, leaving the men and women widowed at an average age of respectively 55 and 52 years. A comparable number of both deaf and hearing widowers entered a second marriage in both time cohorts. These percentages indicate that, although it may have been harder for deaf men to enter a first marriage, they were as successful on the remarriage market. Perhaps the success on the remarriage market can be interpreted as a sign that the low marriage rates of the deaf men were significantly influenced by prejudices about the unsuitability of deaf people marrying. However, once they had been married a first time there may have been less doubt about their abilities to take on marital life. Finding a second spouse proved to be harder for women, in both the deaf and hearing cohorts. Sophia Vanderlinden was the only one of the 5 deaf widows to enter a second marriage, while about half the deaf widowers found a second spouse. Only a mere 4 and 16 percent of the hearing widows remarried, compared to 50 and 61.5 percent of the hearing widowers. Previous research has indeed confirmed that remarriage was more easily achievable and more generally accepted for men.<sup>102</sup>

The median duration of widowhood and the age gap with the second spouse somewhat mitigate the remarriage success of the deaf. The search for a second partner took a deaf widow(er) 3 years on average, which was 1.2 years longer than a hearing person. Second marriages were generally characterized by a larger age gap between the spouses, but the differences between the deaf and hearing populations point to an even weaker homogeneity in the deaf marriages. With an average age gap of 17.3 years (median 15.8 years) the second marriages of the deaf were presumably less equal than those of the siblings, who were on average ‘only’ 11.5 years (median 10.7 years) older or younger than their spouse.

#### 5.4.4 Disabled children and child mortality

In the remainder of this section, I address two more issues. First, I look at an issue particularly relevant for the deaf parents, namely the incidence of disability among the children. Secondly, I examine the frequency of child mortality.

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<sup>102</sup> E.g. Vandenbroeke, C. (1986) *Vrijen en trouwen van de Middeleeuwen tot heden*. Brussels/Amsterdam: Elsevier, 42-44; Van Poppel, F. (1995) “Widows, Widowers and Remarriage in Nineteenth-Century Netherlands” *Population Studies*, 49, 421-41; Oris, M. & Ochiai, E. (2002) “Family Crisis in the Context of Different Family Systems” In: Oris, M. & Derosas, R. (eds.) *When Dad Died. Individuals and Families Coping with Distress in Past Societies*. Bern: Peter Lang, 63-77; Hufton, O. (1995) “Women Without Men” In: Bremmer, J. & van den Bosch, L. (eds.) *Between Poverty and the Pyre: Moments in the History of Widowhood*. London/New York: Routledge, 122-51.

On September 4, 1857 the deaf-mute Marie Therese Verwee married the deaf-mute Edmond Francois Bresous. Marie Therese gave birth to three children. Their oldest son, Jean Charles, born in 1877 was labelled “*stom*” (mute) in the population register of 1891-1900. Their daughter Hortence Marie, born in 1885, received a similar label in the population register of 1901-1910. Their third child, Marie Euphrasie, born in 1887, died at the age of 2 – an age too young to receive a disability label. Despite their disability, both the surviving children married and earned a living as a gilder and dressmaker.

However, interesting as it is to examine whether the research individuals had children who were disabled as well, for most of the children in the dataset I could not discover whether they were in some way disabled. Due to time constraints and source limitations, I could only make use of marriage certificates and population registers to determine whether a child was disabled. However, the population registers of many municipalities did not record whether a person was disabled – as became clear when the deafness of many of the deaf research individuals themselves remained unrecorded. Thus the absence of a disability label in the vital registration data cannot be considered a guarantee that a person was not disabled. I assumed that children were non-disabled only when the population register mentioned the deafness of a research individual but recorded no impairment for the other household members. In some municipalities it was customary to mention the presence of an impairment in the marriage certificate. However, a certificate with no mention of an impairment cannot be interpreted as an indisputable sign of able-bodiedness. Another, more reliable way to determine whether a child was not disabled was the mention of military service in the marriage certificate. In most municipalities, a marriage certificate stated whether the groom had “fulfilled his military duties”. When this was the case, I could be certain that he was not disabled in some way, as this would have led to an exemption from military service. However, I could not determine the disability status in cases where there was no marriage certificate – either because the offspring did not marry or the marriage certificate could not be found – or where a female child was involved.

**Table 5.18** Disability status of the children, in %

N=	Deaf 190	Siblings 983
Disabled	1.1	0.3
Non-disabled	26.3	34.3
Unknown	72.6	65.4
<i>Total</i>	100	100

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Due to these source limitations, the disability status of 138 children (73 percent) of deaf parents and 643 children (65 percent) of hearing parents is unknown. For 50 other chil-

dren, born into 15 deaf households, the population registers and marriage certificates did give a decisive answer about their able-bodiedness. The children mentioned in the example above are the only two children with deaf parents for whom it is certain that they were disabled. As both parents were deaf-mute, the chances of their children being genetically deaf were higher than for the couples in which only one parent was deaf. Three hearing siblings gave birth to a disabled child. Joannes Kints (born in Dikkelvenne in 1843) had 13 children and the second child was labelled “doofstom” (deaf-mute) in the population registers. Although the population registers made no mention of an impairment for the second child of Coralia Marie Brackenier, in his marriage certificate it was stated that Lodewijk Joseph had been exempted from military service due to “impotence”. The third case concerns the hearing research individual Bernardus Callens (born in Beveren in 1798) – brother of the deaf Joanna Catharina Callens – who himself had a deaf-mute son. 34 percent of the children of hearing parents were definitely non-disabled.

Although the numbers are too small to draw conclusions, these findings suggest that the vast majority of deaf parents had hearing children. Previously, I argued how genetics can probably explain the deafness of many congenitally deaf persons (see 3.3.1). However, there are other factors at work too and deafness is not simply passed on from parents to children. In this regard, I observed that none of the parents of the research individuals were reported as being deaf.

For most of the children in the dataset, I could determine whether they died before the age of 16. However, I was unable to do this if the parents migrated out of the province or to an unknown place before a child turned 16. Looking only at those children who could be followed from birth to age of 16<sup>103</sup>, I found that 21.9 percent of the children of deaf research individuals in the first birth cohort died before their sixteenth birthday. In the second birth cohort, the percentage rose to a child mortality rate of 30 percent. In the hearing cohorts rates were slightly higher: 27.2 percent in the first birth cohort and 32.2 percent in the second birth cohort. These child mortality rates are consistent with national averages in the period under observation, and give no indication of important differences in child mortality between the deaf and hearing households.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> The survival to age 16 could not be confirmed for 9 children of the deaf research individuals (4.7 percent), for 54 children of the siblings (5.5 percent).

<sup>104</sup> E.g. Vanderheeren, T. (2009) *Een kwantitatieve analyse van de bevolking en mortaliteit in Antwerpen in de tweede helft van de 19e eeuw*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished master's dissertation), 88-98; Oris, M., Neven, M. & Alter, G. (2004) “Maternal Depletion and Survival Chances of Infants and Children in the Nineteenth-Century Eastern Belgium” In: Breschi, M. & Pozzi, L. (eds.) *The Determinants of Infant and Childhood Mortality in Europe During the Last Two Hundred Years*. Udine: Forum, Editrice Universitaria Udinese, 153-73. Devos, I. (2006) *Allemaal beestjes*, 31 & 47.



### 5.4.5 Summary

This section has shown that the marriage behaviour of the deaf was reflected in an important way in the characteristics of their fertility behaviour. In line with the low marriage rates of deaf women, it was less common for deaf women to become unwed mothers. Presumably less involved in courtship, their opportunities to engage in extramarital sex were more limited. Moreover, those deaf women who did become pregnant out of wedlock were very unsuccessful in persuading the father of their child to marry them. In contrast to the high marriage rates of hearing single mothers, the majority of the deaf unwed mothers remained single their entire lives.

A high average age at marriage among the deaf translated itself into an average smaller family size. Large families (six children or more) were common among the siblings, while many of the deaf couples were childless or had a family of three children on average. The median surplus of two children in the hearing families was mainly the result of the shorter reproductive period of the deaf, resulting from their higher age at marriage. In a time period in which effective means of birth control were largely absent, the postponement of marriage was probably the most important cause of family limitation. After marriage, the deaf and hearing couples exhibited no differences in the interval between births (*spacing*) or in the timing of the end of childbirth (*stopping*). It appears that once the critical threshold of getting married was crossed, the lives of the deaf were similar to those of the hearing. This also became apparent in the success of deaf widowers on the marriage market. Deaf widows remarried less frequently, but this was also the case for hearing women. Nonetheless, it took the deaf slightly longer to find a new spouse and the age gap in the second marriage was more often larger. Disablement was not more common among the children of deaf parents, nor was child mortality.

## 5.5 Conclusion

The focus in this chapter has been on the deaf men and women who led a settled married life and whether or not their fertility behaviour differed from that of their hearing siblings. This means the focus has been on a minority of deaf individuals. Indeed, the vast majority of deaf men and women remained single their entire lives. Undoubtedly the presence of an impairment complicated the search for a suitable spouse. The higher marriage rates of hearing persons with similar life trajectories to the deaf indicate that the deaf were confronted with specific *barriers* which reduced their success on the marriage market. However, the low marriage rates of the deaf should not be unilaterally

interpreted as a sign of failure, as a demonstration of the inability of the deaf to lead a 'normal' life. Marriage may not have been the goal of all deaf men and women, and celibacy should not be considered merely "*a measure of those who failed to obtain a spouse, but also as an index of changing life alternatives and the willingness of men and women to pursue them*".<sup>105</sup> It can be assumed that the extent to which a single life was considered a choice was influenced by the options single deaf men and women had for leading a fulfilling life. Did they manage to set up a one-person household or were they destined to live in the households of others? And did living in with family or non-relatives mean that they were unable to live an independent life? In Chapter 6, I explore the survival strategies of singles, as well as the social networks that could act as alternatives to a married life.

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<sup>105</sup> Ward, P. (1990) *Courtship, Love and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century English Canada*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 52; De Langhe, S. (2013) *Oude vrijsters*, 427-8.



## 6 Social and physical mobility

### 6.1 Introduction

The difficulties the deaf encountered on the labour and marriage market undoubtedly determined their living conditions and options. Deaf men and women were more often unemployed and without a spouse for support than hearing people, so they had to turn to alternative survival strategies. With survival strategy, I refer to the range of actions that men and women undertook to cope with or overcome the challenges of life.<sup>1</sup> Next to labour and other economic strategies, the role of *social* strategies has been a major topic in literature. Besides claiming benefits and charity, historian Alan Kidd points to the role of family and neighbours as important sources of support in times of poverty.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Sofie De Langhe states that the life courses of single women in the eighteenth century were largely determined by the size of their *social capital* – the advantages obtained from social relationships.<sup>3</sup>

So far, insights into the social networks of people with disabilities have been rare. Moreover, the relationship with family and relatives has mainly been approached from the perspective of *care*: people with disabilities being perceived as passive members of a

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of survival ‘strategy’ has been debated as *strategy* inherently implies that individuals were free to shape their lives as they chose, while their possibilities were actually the result of a sequence of implicit decisions and determined and limited by their specific living situation. (E.g. Fontaine, L. & Schlumbohm, J. (2000) “Household Strategies for Survival: An Introduction” In: Fontaine, L. & Schlumbohm, J. (eds.) *Household Strategies for Survival 1600-2000: Fission, Faction and Cooperation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 6-8).

<sup>2</sup> Kidd, A. (1999) *State, Society and the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2.

<sup>3</sup> De Langhe, S. (2013) *Oude vrijsters: bestaansstrategieën van ongehuwde vrouwen op het Brugse platteland, late achttiende eeuw-begintjentiende eeuw*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished PhD dissertation), 71.

household, who need care from the family for their survival.<sup>4</sup> Disability scholars have assumed that in the course of the nineteenth century, there was an evolution from informal care from relatives and the extended family to institutions established by the state. People with disabilities were increasingly seen as a burden to the family and became a social ‘problem’ which could be solved by placing them in institutions of all kinds and taking them “*out of the mainstream of social life*”.<sup>5</sup> The increasing frequency with which institutions were established in nineteenth-century Europe seems to support this assumption. In this narrative, people with disabilities are assigned a passive role. They are considered unable to live an independent life and be in constant need of others for their survival. In the first instance, they were considered the responsibility of family and kin, but when traditional kinship ties and patterns of mutual assistance failed, the responsibility had to be taken over by institutions. Scholars such as Horden and Smith have contested the belief in a “*golden era*” of family care before the nineteenth century and claim that already in the period before the nineteenth century, society was characterized by a “*mixed economy of care*”, in which the role of community networks and vertical, more formal ties were as equally important as immediate family. Professor in social work, Raymond Jack, stated in this regard: “[...] *institutions [...] are interdependent and complementary [to the family], rather than more and less desirable or just plain good and bad*”.<sup>6</sup> In Chapter 7, the development of formal care facilities for the deaf is discussed in more detail.

In this chapter, the life course data and methodology are used to examine the extent to which deaf men and women were embedded within their home communities and participated in a fully fledged manner in family and social life, as well as how their social networks were affected by nineteenth-century changes. In the analysis, deaf individuals are not merely perceived as individuals in need of care, but as active agents. Just like their able-bodied peers, deaf people sought genuine relationships of friendship, affection and love. According to Hutchison, they found these relationships through the normal networks of family and friends.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> E.g. Stockman, R. (2000) *Van nar tot patiënt. Een geschiedenis van de zorg voor geesteszieken*. Leuven: Davidsfonds; Horden, P. & Smith, R. (eds.) (1998) *The Locus of Care. Families, Communities, Institutions and the Provision of Welfare since Antiquity*. London/New York: Routledge.

<sup>5</sup> Branson, J. & Miller, D. (2002) *Damned for Their Difference: The Cultural Construction of Deaf People as Disabled: A Sociological History*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 9; Oliver, M. (1990) *The Politics of Disablement: A Sociological Approach*. New York: St. Martin's press, 28.

<sup>6</sup> Jack, R. (1998) “Institutions in Community Care” In: Jack, R. (ed.) *Residential Versus Community Care: The Role of Institutions in Welfare Provision*. Basingstoke: MacMillan, 12, 17-8.

<sup>7</sup> Hutchison, I. (2007) *A History of Disability in Nineteenth-Century Scotland*. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 322-3.

The social networks of the deaf are approached in two main sections, one focusing on what I call ‘physical mobility’ (6.2), and the other on ‘social mobility’ (6.3). In section 6.2, I study the living situation and household composition of the research population and their migration behaviour based on residential information in the civil certificates and population registers. Most deaf people did not get married and although not exclusively, I am primarily interested in this group: how did these men and women, who did not conform to a traditional lifestyle, structure their life courses? And what role did family and friends play: were they merely providers of care or do we find evidence of an active relationship between the deaf singles and their families? By reconstructing the households that the deaf men and women lived in, the role of family and the different survival strategies of deaf individuals are explored. As I follow the research individuals through their various living situations, this section also addresses issues of migration. Were people with disabilities less likely to migrate due to the greater difficulties in fitting into a new community? Or did their dependency on other people compel them to move from household to household, or from institution to institution? An examination of the frequency, direction and distance over which people migrated, as well as the nature (temporary or permanent) and timing of migration can shed light on the factors that influenced decisions to emigrate and the extent to which migration reflected aspects of human agency, personal choice and/or inevitability.

In the second part of this chapter (section 6.3), the social networks of the deaf are scrutinized on the one hand by a quantitative analysis of the witnesses present at their marriage and death, and on the other by looking at the social life of the deaf from a qualitative perspective. Several scholars have recognized the potential of studying witnesses in demographic records to reconstruct patterns of sociability.<sup>8</sup> The study of witnesses allows one to determine the extent to which the deaf were able to stay in contact with family and friends, as well as the ways in which social networks developed throughout the nineteenth century. The profile of the marriage and death witnesses is the focal point in 6.3.1. The nineteenth century was characterized by the development of a deaf community. The establishment of deaf schools in the nineteenth century created a sense of community and self-awareness among the deaf, which inspired the establishment of deaf clubs and associations, publications and events organized by and for

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<sup>8</sup> Van Poppel, F. & Shoonheim, M. (2005) “Measuring Cultural Differences between Religions Using Network Data. An Example Based on Nineteenth-Century Dutch Marriage Certificates” *Annales de Démographie Historique*, 1, 173-97; Matthijs, K. (2006) “Changing Patterns of Familial Sociability. Family Members as Witnesses to (Re)marriage in Nineteenth-Century Flanders” *Journal of Family History*, 31/2, 115-43; Bras, H. (2011) “Intensification of Family Relations? Changes in the Choices of Marriage Witnesses in the Netherlands 1830-1950” *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis*, 8/4, 102-35.

deaf people. By examining newspaper articles, I also look at the opportunities available to deaf people in East Flanders to engage in a variety of social activities (6.3.2).

## 6.2 Physical mobility: living situation and migration

### 6.2.1 Introduction

Until the 1960s, the dominant idea was that complex family forms were inversely associated with economic development. This idea originated in the late nineteenth century, when Frédéric Le Play wrote that stem families, in which one or more children continued to live with the parent(s), were disappearing as a result of the “new *manufacturing system of Western Europe*”. By the middle of the twentieth century there was a general consensus that the establishment of an industrial society resulted in the weakening of kinship ties and the breakthrough of a simple nuclear family system.<sup>9</sup>

However, in the 1960s this idea was contested by, among others, the British mathematician John Hajnal and British historian Peter Laslett. They claimed that northwest Europe was characterized by a nuclear family system from much earlier on, and developed a theory in which they divided pre-industrial Europe into three regions based on the prevailing marriage patterns and household structures. The Hajnal line was drawn from north to south, dividing Europe into an eastern part, characterised by a pattern of early and universal marriage, and a western part, with a pattern of delayed marriage and a high number of singles. I discussed this west European marriage pattern in Chapter 2 (2.3.3). A few years later, spurred by Peter Laslett and the Cambridge Group, a second line was introduced in western Europe, running from west to east. Households to the north of this line were nuclear in structure, consisting of parents and unmarried children. In the south, households were more often larger and extended with kin and non-relatives.<sup>10</sup> The dominant pattern of nuclear households was related to the practice of neolocality: in north-west Europe it was common for couples to set up an independ-

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<sup>9</sup> Ruggles, S. (2009) “Reconsidering the Northwest European Family System: Living Arrangements of the Aged in Comparative Historical Perspective” *Population and Development Review*, 35/2, 249-50. Based on: Le Play, F. (1884) *L'organisation de la famille selon le vrai modèle signalé par l'histoire de toutes les races et de tous les temps*. Tours: A. Mame.

<sup>10</sup> Hajnal, J. (1965) “European Marriage Patterns in Perspective” In: Glass, D.V. & Eversley, D.E.C. (eds.) *Population in History: Essays in Historical Demography*. London: E. Arnold, 101; Laslett, P. (1977) *Family Life and Illicit Love in Earlier Generations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 15.

ent household after marriage. The nuclear independent family, living apart from relatives, was therefore the accepted family unit. In contrast, households of one or two unmarried persons living on their own or childless households were considered uncommon.<sup>11</sup>

Although Laslett situated the nuclear family system earlier in history, in his *nuclear hardship hypothesis* he did agree with his predecessors that in a nuclear household system there was a lack of solidarity between family and kin, i.e. relatives living separately.<sup>12</sup> According to Laslett, the clear prevalence of neolocal, nuclear family households in northwest Europe implied that certain individuals, such as singles and widowed parents, were inevitably left without family support in a condition of actual or potential hardship. Members of nuclear families were thought of as being more individualistic and unwilling to take responsibility for the needs of relatives. As a result, resolving problems of dependency brought about by economic hardship, age and ill health was vitally dependent on external support. For this reason, collective systems of formal care were established earlier and were more advanced in areas with a nuclear household system.<sup>13</sup> The effects of the more frequent loneliness in weak-family societies was compensated for by well-developed civil societies that were based on individual initiatives.<sup>14</sup> This is not to say that Laslett denied the supportive role that kin could play in the lives of individuals, but these kinship relations were considered short-lived and occasional: “Kinship cannot have been a finally reliable source for those in trouble during the ancien régime”.<sup>15</sup>

Already in the 1970s, Laslett’s thesis was coming under criticism. It was contended that the alleged cultural regions were hardly homogeneous, and that the data available contradicted such a sharp dichotomy.<sup>16</sup> The category ‘nuclear family’ was perceived as be-

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<sup>11</sup> Laslett, P. (1977) *Family Life and Illicit Love*, 61.

<sup>12</sup> Laslett, P. (1988) “Family, Kinship and Collectivity as Systems of Support in Pre-Industrial Europe: A Consideration of the Nuclear-Hardship Hypothesis” *Continuity and Change*, 3, 153–75.

<sup>13</sup> Cavallo, S. (1998) “Family Obligations and Inequalities in Access to Care in Northern Italy, Seventeenth to Eighteenth Centuries” In: Smith, R. & Horden, P. (eds.) *The Locus of Care. Families, Communities, Institutions and the Provision of Welfare since Antiquity*. New York: Routledge, 90-1.

<sup>14</sup> Reher, D. (1998) “Family Ties in Western Europe. Persistent Contrasts” *Population and Development Review*, 24/2, 217.

<sup>15</sup> Tadmor, N. (2001) *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship, and Patronage*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 110-1; Laslett, P. (1988) “Family, Kinship and Collectivity”, 162.

<sup>16</sup> Viazzo, P.P. (2010) “Family, Kinship and Welfare Provision in Europe, Past and Present: Commonalities and Divergences” *Continuity and Change*, 25/1, 142. Lutz Berkner, for example, showed that in eighteenth-century Austria, which was supposedly characterized by a stem family system, many of the households were in fact nuclear. Berkner, L.K. (1972) “The Stem Family and the Developmental Cycle of the Peasant Household: An Eighteenth-Century Austrian Example” *American Historical Review*, 77, 393-418. An overview of this debate can



ing too static and narrow with regard to life course changes and unrepresentative in view of the complex kinship relationships that could exist in families.<sup>17</sup> Scholars demonstrated that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century households could be composed of kin and various other persons, living together for economic, practical and emotional reasons and pointed out the important role of the extended family as a safety net and sounding board for decision-making.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, several studies contradicted the alleged lack of solidarity of nuclear households with singles and elderly people.<sup>19</sup> Historian Tamara Hareven, among others, underlined the major support of relatives over the entire life course, both on a routine basis and in times of stress. She argued that kin assistance was essential “*both in coping with the insecurities dictated by the industrial system, such as unemployment, and in coping with personal and family crises, especially death*”. This mutual support was not limited to people living in the same household, but extended beyond the household by people sharing and exchanging resources and labour. For example, this is evident in the conscious efforts of kin to live near each other. These traditional kinship ties and patterns of mutual assistance were moreover, not broken by urbanization and industrialization, according to Hareven. Kin still played a practical role in the lives of individuals, for example in facilitating migration, in the search for a job and home, and in providing assistance in critical situations.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Hilde Bras and Theo Van Tilburg verified the persistence of kinship values and relationships into the late twentieth-century Netherlands.<sup>21</sup> Angelique Janssens showed for Tilburg that nineteenth-

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be found in: Puschmann, P. & Solli, A. (2014) “Household and Family During Urbanization and Industrialization: Efforts to Shed New Light on an Old Debate” *The History of the Family*, 19/1, 1-12.

<sup>17</sup> Tadmor, N. (2001) *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England*, 6; E.g. Goody, J. (1972) “Domestic Groups” *Anthropology*, 28, 1-32; Hareven, T.K. (1977) “The Family Life Cycle in Historical Perspective: A Proposal for a Developmental Approach” In: Cuisinier J. & Segalen M. (eds.) *Le cycle de la vie familial dans les sociétés européennes*. The Hague: Mouton, 229-352.

<sup>18</sup> E.g. Segalen, M. (1977) “The Family Cycle and Household Structure: Five Generations in a French Village” *Journal of Family History*, 2/3, 223-36.

<sup>19</sup> For example, Steven Ruggels shows that the coresidence of elderly people with the younger generation was a social norm. Ruggles, S. (1994) *The Effects of Demographic Change on Multigenerational Family Structure. United States Whites, 1880-1890*. Milwaukee: University of Minnesota.

<sup>20</sup> Hareven, T.K. (1974) “The Family as Process: The historical Study of the Family Cycle” *Journal of Social History*, 7, 322-9; Hareven, T.K. (ed.) (1977) *Family and Kin in American Urban Communities, 1780-1940*. New York: Franklin and Watts; Hareven, T.K. (1978) “The dynamics of Kin in an Industrial Community” In: Demos J. & Boocock S. (eds.) *Turning Points: Historical and Sociological Essays on the Family: American Journal of Sociology*, 84 Supplement. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Hareven, T.K. (2000) *Families, History and Social Change. Life-Course and Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. Oxford: Westview Press, 52-5.

<sup>21</sup> Bras, H. & Van Tilburg, T. (2007) “Kinship and Social Networks: A Regional Analysis of Sibling Relations in Twentieth-Century Netherlands” *Journal of Family History*, 32, 296-322. In this study, Bras and van Tilburg investigate how different family forms influenced the size and composition of social networks and the relationships among elderly siblings born in farming families between 1903 and 1937 in three regions of the Netherlands.

century economic developments did not put an end to the formation of extended family households.<sup>22</sup>

Recently, there has been renewed interest in past household formation and its consequences for individual lives and society.<sup>23</sup> Researchers have recognized household composition as a highly influential factor in the life chances of its individual members, with regard to their survival, well-being, migration and other events.<sup>24</sup> But family links beyond the unit living together were identified as being important as well.<sup>25</sup> According to Muriel Neven, these “two types of ‘families’ - households and family networks - were complementary and acted simultaneously on the life course”.<sup>26</sup>

However, the support of family and kin does not seem to have been unconditional. Economic considerations played a role in taking in relatives, and not all relatives were equally welcome. For instance, Jan Kok and Kees Mandemakers have shown that in nineteenth-century Utrecht, Zeeland and Friesland the experiences of people who never married differed sharply from those who had been married. Permanently single men and women lived on their own for longer periods of time and were more often found taken in by non-family households, instead of by married members of the family.<sup>27</sup>

The position of disabled family members in family households and kinship relations has so far received little scholarly attention, except for disability combined with old age. In his paper on the living arrangements of older persons in nineteenth-century America, Steven Ruggles examined the effect of disability and sickness of elderly parents on their living situation. He found that sick and disabled parents were less likely to reside with

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<sup>22</sup> Janssens, A. (1986) “Industrialization Without Family Change? The Extended Family and the Life Cycle in a Dutch Industrial Town, 1880-1920” *Journal of Family History*, 11, 25-42.

<sup>23</sup> Kok, J. & Mandemakers, K. (2010) “A Life-Course Approach to Co-Residence in the Netherlands, 1850-1940” *Continuity and Change*, 25/2, 285.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. Bengtsson, T., Campbell, C. & Lee, J.Z. (eds.) (2004) *Life Under Pressure: Mortality and Living Standards in Europe and Asia, 1700-1900*. Cambridge/London: The MIT Press; Alter, G., Dribe, M. & Van Poppel, F. (2007) “Widowhood, Family Size, and Post-Reproductive Mortality: A Comparative Analysis of Three Populations in Nineteenth-Century Europe” *Demography*, 44/4, 785-806; Duraes, M., Fauve-Chamoux, A., Ferrer, L. & Kok, J. (eds.) (2009) *The Transmission of Well-Being: Gendered Marriage Strategies and Inheritance Systems in Europe (17th-20th Centuries)*. Bern: Lang.

<sup>25</sup> E.g. De Langhe, S. (2013) *Oude vrijsters*; Plakans, A. & Wetherell, C. (2003) “Households and Kinship Networks: The Costs and Benefits of Contextualization” *Continuity and Change*, 18/1, 49-76; Oris, M. & Ochiai, E. (2002) “Family Crisis in the Context of Different Family Systems: Frameworks and Evidence on ‘When Dad Died’” In: Derosas, R. & Oris, M. (eds.) *When Dad Died. Individuals and Families Coping with Distress in Past Societies*. Bern: Lang, 17-80; Kok, J. & Mandemakers, K. “Falend kernegezin? Opvang van zwakkeren in Nederlandse huishoudens, 1850-1940” In: Matthijs, K. et al. (eds.) *Gender in/en historische demografie*. Leuven: Acco, 233-58.

<sup>26</sup> Neven, M. (2002) “The Influence of the Wider Kin Group on Individual Life-Course Transitions: Results from the Pays de Herve (Belgium), 1846-1900” *Continuity and Change*, 17/3, 405-35.

<sup>27</sup> Kok, J. & Mandemakers, K. (2010) “A Life-Course Approach to Co-Residence in the Netherlands”, 297.

one of their children than healthy parents, as disabled parents had less to offer as incentive to be taken in.<sup>28</sup> Previously, sociologists R. Angel and M. Tienda had already pointed to the economic considerations that were taken into account in the decision to extend the family. They showed that if the household head was employed full-time the odds of having an extended family decreased significantly. In contrast, in times of great social and economic upheaval, nuclear families were more eager to take in an extra person who could contribute to the household income. Angel and Tienda stress that the assistance did not need to be economic to render economic benefits. Live-in relatives and non-relatives could also help out with domestic duties, enabling other household members to engage in more profitable labour activities.<sup>29</sup> The question of why and in what circumstances relatives decided to share a dwelling is difficult to answer. Kok and Mandemakers say that this decision cannot always be traced back to a “cost-benefit analysis” based on the economic value of co-residence (e.g. combined wages, extra labour or care giving).<sup>30</sup> Other scholars point to the altruistic motives that played a role in co-residence: families could also take in relatives to help them out. Yet, as co-residence based on family values was less common in poorer families, this suggests that financial considerations should not be neglected.<sup>31</sup>

## 6.2.2 Research population and methodology

In this section, I wish to address the living situation of the research population by looking into aspects of household composition. Although the reconstruction of household composition based on population registers appears fairly straightforward, several factors complicate this kind of research. First, household composition was subject to change, alongside the life courses of the individual household members.<sup>32</sup> Relatives and

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<sup>28</sup> Ruggles, S. (2003) “Multigenerational Families in Nineteenth-Century America” *Continuity and change*, 18/1, 156-7.

<sup>29</sup> Angel, R. & Tienda, M. (1982) “Determinants of Extended Household Structure: Cultural Pattern or Economic Need?” *American Journal of Sociology*, 87/6, 1380.

<sup>30</sup> Kok, J. & Mandemakers, K. (2010) “A Life-Course Approach to Co-Residence in the Netherlands”, 287.

<sup>31</sup> Kok, J. & Mandemakers, K. (2009) “Je zoudt maar last van mij hebben. Verwanten in het Nederlandse huishouden, 1860-1940” *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis*, 6/4, 144-5; Janssens, A. (1993) *Family and Social Change. The Household as a Process in an Industrializing Community*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 128; De Vries, B. (1998) “Familiehulp 1800-1890” In: van Gerwen, J. & van Leeuwen, M.H.D. (eds.) *Studies over zekerheidsarrangementen. Risico's, risicobestrijding en verzekeringen in Nederland vanaf de Middeleeuwen*. Amsterdam/The Hague: Nederlands Economisch Historisch Archief, 467-80.

<sup>32</sup> Hareven, T.K. (2000) *Families, History and Social Change*, 4. Similarly, Angelique Janssens showed that household extension was to a high degree “specific to the life cycle”. Janssens, A. (1986) “Industrialization Without Family Change? 32.

non-relatives could enter and leave a household at different points in time, with each event unique to each household. So to capture the processes of household expansion and contraction it is necessary to follow households over time, instead of looking at a static snapshot in time. Scholars such as Richard Wall have underlined the importance of a longitudinal and individual perspective in household formation research.<sup>33</sup> A second problem is that household composition depends on the ‘pool’ of kin available for co-residence. An individual can be living on their own because of a wish to live independently or because there are no living relatives. Without insight into the underlying demographic processes that affected each household, such as fertility, mortality and migration, it is difficult to interpret the incidence of a specific household type.<sup>34</sup> Third, household composition needs to be conceptualized within a specific context of time and place. Previous research has suggested that factors such as environment (urban/rural), employment patterns, socio-economic status, size of the house and inheritance practices had a significant effect on decision-making with regard to household composition.<sup>35</sup> Finally, even if we could take into account all these elements, we are still faced with the previously mentioned difficulty of how we should interpret household composition. Co-residence always entails two parties: the co-resident household member and the receiving household. Each party can decide to co-reside for different reasons. Without ego-documents, we can only make assumptions in this regard.

These problems are closely linked to the methodology and unit of analysis. Most historians have researched the number of households of particular types instead of counting the number of individuals in particular living arrangements. However, as Hammel already observed in 1984: “*The household is simply not a very good unit of observation.*”<sup>36</sup> From this perspective, Ruggles, Watkins and others have advocated an individual-level measurement as better able to represent the lived experiences of historical actors.<sup>37</sup> So, in-

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<sup>33</sup> Wall, R. (2002) “Widows: Perceptions, Demography, Residence Patterns, and Standards of Living” *The History of the Family*, 7/1, 3–12.

<sup>34</sup> Kok J. & Mandemakers K. (2010) “A Life-Course Approach to Co-Residence in the Netherlands”, 287.

<sup>35</sup> Kok J. & Mandemakers K. (2012) “Nuclear Hardship in the Nuclear Heartland? Families and Welfare in The Netherlands, 1850-1940” Working paper, WOG. E.g De Haan, H. (1994) *In the Shadow of the Tree. Kinship, Property and Inheritance among Farm Families*. Amsterdam: Spinhuis; De Vries, B. (1998) “Familiehulp 1800-1890”, 467-80.

<sup>36</sup> Hammel, E.A. (1984) “On the \*\*\* of Investigating Household Form and Function” In: Netting, R.M., Wilk, R.R. & Arnould, E.J. (eds.) *Households: Comparative and Historical Studies of the Domestic Group*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 40.

<sup>37</sup> King, M. & Preston, S.H. (1990) “Who Lives With Whom? Individual Versus Household Measures” *Journal of Family History*, 15/2, 117-8; Ruggles, S. (1987) *Prolonged Connections: The Rise of the Extended Family in Nineteenth Century England and America*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press; Watkins, S. (1980) “On Measuring Transitions and Turning Points” *Historical Methods*, 13, 181-7.

stead of counting the number of extended households, it is better to look at the number of individuals living in an extended household.

In this section the individual perspective is applied to an even greater extent by making use of the life course methodology. Kok and Mandemakers discussed the benefits of life course analysis for this kind of research in their 2010 article. The life course approach allows to look at co-residence from two perspectives: from that of people who are living in the households of others, and from that of the households taking in relatives. This double-sided approach can shed more light on the motives underlying co-residence. Households can take in relatives for family-related reasons, such as the desire to help relatives in need, but co-residency can also be a rational choice – it may have been a strategic move to further one’s career or to improve the household’s economy.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the life course methodology enables to control for the number of relatives available for co-residency to some extent, as well as for changes over time and context-specific variables.

So far, I have used the concepts of *family* and *household* interchangeably. It is important to distinguish between both concepts. While *family* refers to persons who are related by blood ties but not necessarily living under the same roof, *household* is used to refer to residing persons. Although most people share a household with family, this is not necessarily the case. In this section the focus is on the relationship of the research individuals with the members of their household rather than on the importance of family. This is not to deny that kin who were not co-residing could have a significant effect on the lives of disabled individuals, especially if they were living nearby. However, sources documenting the forms of support and solidarity among non-resident kin are difficult to find.<sup>39</sup> Van Tilburg and Bras have indicated the importance of letters, diaries and personal documents as excellent sources for revealing how kin interacted and what kind of support was exchanged in periods of crisis and in everyday life.<sup>40</sup> The analysis of marriage and death witnesses can provide a valuable alternative in this regard. By comparing household composition at marriage and at death with information about family witnesses, the relationship with more distant relatives can be reconstructed to a certain extent (see 6.3.1). For now, the focus is on household composition and formation. Although household composition does not cover the entirety of social relationships, it does provide us with an important indication of a person’s closest social network, as well as their survival strategy.

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<sup>38</sup> Kok, J. & Mandemakers, K. (2010) “A Life-Course Approach to Co-Residence in the Netherlands”, 308.

<sup>39</sup> Levi, G. (1990) “Family and Kin: A Few Thoughts” *Journal of Family History*, 15/1, 568.

<sup>40</sup> Bras, H. & Van Tilburg, T. (2007) “Kinship and Social Networks: A Regional Analysis of Sibling Relations in twentieth-century Netherlands” *Journal of Family History*, 32/3, 297.

The reconstruction of the living arrangements and household composition of the research individuals is strongly dependent on the birth dates of the subjects. In the period before 1846, I only have residential information for specific life events such as marriage and death, or at snapshots in time when a census was carried out. Yet, while marriage and death certificates inform us about the address of a person, the household composition remains largely unknown. Most of the death certificates specify whether a person died in their own house, the house of someone else or in an institution. If a person was living in, it was common that a co-resident acted as a witness in the certificate. However, it is impossible to ascertain the size and composition of the household. The living arrangements of individuals born and living after the introduction of population registers in 1846 can be reconstructed in more detail. Indeed, population registers give a comprehensive overview of the individual members in each household, living at the same address. For each member of the household they give the name, occupation, place of birth, age or date of birth, relationship to the household head, marital status, date of arrival in the municipality and the previous residence. If a new person entered the household through birth or immigration, or if a person changed marital status, moved within the community or died in the period before the next census, amendments were made to the registers. In the case of a move within the municipality or outmigration, the date of departure and destination (street and/or municipality) were indicated. As a result, population registers not only document particular moments in life, but provide a continuous description of household composition and individual trajectories.

Although very rich in information, population registers can present some difficulties with regard to the interpretation of household composition. First of all, the head of the household was often unspecified, as was the relationship of the other household members to the head. In a nuclear family household, this is less of a problem as we can assume that the father was the head of the household, living together with his spouse and children. In complex family households the interpretation of the household relationships poses more problems. Without a recorded relationship – and without a clear occupational specification such as maid or servant – it is impossible to ascertain whether a co-resident with a last name different from both spouses was kin or non-related. Similarly, it is difficult to determine who lived in whose household. Was a widowed mother living in the family of her son (head) and daughter-in-law, or was her son living in with her (stem-family with mother as head)? Sometimes the address can clarify the matter, but not in all cases. Moreover, the problem of unrecorded migration and institutionalization, which I discussed in Chapter 2 (2.1.2.4), renders many household histories incomplete or difficult to interpret.

These source-related problems combined with the large variation in and instability of household composition complicate a straightforward quantitative representation. A discussion of the living arrangements of the research population therefore requires a

creative approach. In this chapter, I assume five possible types of households: 1) complex family households, 2) simple family households, 3) non-family households, 4) single person households, and 5) institutions.

The first category comprises joint, extended and stem family households. The term *joint household* refers to households consisting of extra vertical generations: parents and children living together with grandparents and/or grandchildren. *Extended households* consist of horizontal relationships: siblings, whether or not with their spouse and offspring, share a home with a sibling, nephew or niece. The *stem household* is a household in which only one sibling remains at home with the parents, taking over as head of the household. The second category comprises conjugal and nuclear family households. The *conjugal* family household consists of a couple without children, whereas the *nuclear* family household consists of a couple with children. The third category of *non-family* households refers to households in which two or more non-related individuals live together. *Single person households*, the fourth category, refers to individuals living on their own. The category of *institutions* was added as a special type of household for individuals residing in a wide range of institutional settings (convents, elderly homes, orphanages, nursing houses, etc.). These latter three household types are considered to be more solitary than the first two household types.<sup>41</sup> All these households could have been extended by unrelated members, such as tenants, lodgers, maids and apprentices for various reasons. These people may have paid to be part of the household, as is the case of lodgers, or they may have been paid to be there, as is the case of servants.

A person could have belonged to different types of households throughout their life course, with different household members and occupying a different position (head or different relationships to the household head). In the analysis of household formation and composition, I start from the assumption that it is possible to classify the different living arrangements of people into some standard *cycles* of household formation. In other words, groups of people experience similar patterns of household formation during their lives. By trying to classify the different life stories of the research individuals in comprehensible household formation cycles, it becomes possible to make comparisons between cohorts and to discern the circumstances causing the different household trajectories.

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<sup>41</sup> Oris et al. developed a typology of solitude consisting of five types of households: (1) people living together with non-kin, (2) persons living alone, (3) singles above the average age at first marriage (30 years old) and below the age of 45, and those aged 45 and over (4) widows and widowers, and (5) non-stem kin of extended households and members of non-nuclear households. Oris, M., Ritschard, G. & Ryczkowska, G. (2004) *Solitude and Vulnerability in Female Life Courses, Geneva, 1816-1843*. Unpublished conference paper presented at the Social Science History Association Annual Meeting, Chicago.

## 6.2.3 Household formation and composition

We can assume differences in household formation and composition alongside variables such as birth cohort, socio-economic status and gender.<sup>42</sup> However, research has shown that the most influential factor determining a person's living situation was their civil status. The life courses of married men and women were distinctly different from those of unmarried individuals. The distinction married/unmarried is therefore the starting point in 6.2.3.1 and 6.2.3.2. Differences according to gender and changes in time are addressed in conjunction with this dichotomy. The previous chapter showed that the majority of hearing siblings was married, while most deaf persons remained permanently single – making the representation of hearing and deaf individuals in both sections markedly different. In 6.2.3.3 I look at differences in living arrangements according to region and SES.

### 6.2.3.1 A life in matrimony

The most obvious household formation cycle for men and women consisted of two main phases. In the first phase, during childhood and young adulthood, they lived as a son or daughter in the household of their parents, with their father (or widowed mother) as head of the household. The parental household could have been nuclear or complex, whether or not there were co-residents. In a second phase, after marriage, they became head of the household or wife of the household head. Between these two phases, they could have lived in another household, usually as a servant or maid to a non-related household head.<sup>43</sup> This life path was common for the majority of hearing siblings, but in

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<sup>42</sup> Besides these individual characteristics, household and context characteristics (regional, economic and demographic factors) have been identified as influential on household formation and composition and a person's decision on whether to leave home. (E.g. Dribe, M. (2004) "Leaving Home as a Family Strategy in Times of Economic and Demographic Stress. The Case of Rural Scania, Sweden 1829-1866" In: Van Poppel, F., Oris, M. & Lee, J. (eds.)(2004) *The Road to Independence. Leaving Home in Western and Eastern Societies, 16th-20th Centuries*. Bern: Lang, 85-116; Bras, H. & Kok, J. (2004) "'Naturally, Every Child Was Supposed to Work'. Determinants of the Leaving Home Process in the Netherlands, 1850-1940" In: Van Poppel, F., Oris, M. & Lee, J. (eds.)(2004) *The Road to Independence. Leaving Home in Western and Eastern Societies, 16th-20th Centuries*. Bern: Lang, 403-50.) However, as I am mainly interested in the differences between deaf and hearing people, and both groups in the dataset shared the same household and context characteristics, there is less focus on the differences according to these variables.

<sup>43</sup> A comprehensive collection of essays about leaving home in Western and Eastern societies from the sixteenth to twentieth century is provided by Van Poppel, Oris and Lee: Van Poppel, F., Oris, M. & Lee, J. (eds.)(2004) *The Road to Independence. Leaving Home in Western and Eastern Societies, 16th-20th Centuries*. Bern: Lang.



line with the low marriage rates of deaf men and women, rather exceptional for the deaf.

Although most married men and women shared this cycle of household formation, the composition of the households could be distinctly different. For example, Petrus Van Peteghem, born in 1846 in Massemen, lived in the house of his widowed mother with his deaf-mute brother until he married Maria Clementina De Winter in 1894. From that moment he became the head of a new household. Petrus and Maria Clementina had four children. When his oldest daughter Maria Louisa married before her eighteenth birthday, her husband came to live in his house. It was probably the young ages of both the spouses that prevented them from setting up an independent household. Maria Louisa soon gave birth to two children, making Petrus head of a joint family household. The death of Maria Louisa's husband and two children within three years of her marriage, however, turned the household into a nuclear family household again. Emmanuel Honoré Wittock, born deaf in Temse in 1844, married Celina Maria De Stobbeleir in 1880. After marriage, he and his wife shared a household with his unmarried stepsister, his stepbrother and his wife and a maidservant. Emmanuel Honoré, as well as his stepsister and stepbrother, were considered joint heads of the extended family household. Both married couples had children while living together, but all three of Emmanuel Honoré's children died at birth. In 1901, Emmanuel Honoré and his wife moved out and set up a conjugal household, extended with one servant. Although these life stories show that complex family households were not exceptional among the research individuals, the majority of married men and women, both in the hearing and deaf cohorts, left the parental house to set up a conjugal or nuclear household. Moreover, those living in a more complex family household usually only did so for a short period of time. This pattern is confirmed by looking at the residential situation at the death of the deaf individuals and siblings still married at the time of death (table 6.1).

**Table 6.1** Household composition at death, married individuals, in %

	<b>Deaf</b>	<b>Siblings</b>
<b>N=</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>98</b>
Nuclear household	60.7	55
Conjugal household	25	14.2
Complex household	3.6	10.8
Other household type	3.6	0.8
Unknown	7.1	19.2
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

About 86 percent of the deaf individuals and 69 percent of the siblings were living in a conjugal or nuclear household at the time of death. Complex households and other

household types (non-family households, single person households and institutions) were rare. Most of the complex households were joint family households with co-residing grandchildren.

One deaf man (2 percent) and seven siblings (4 percent) did not leave the parental household after marriage, but had their spouses moving in with them. After the death of both parents, they continued to live in the parental house with their spouses and children. Flanders was characterized by an inheritance practice according to which, in theory, offspring received an equal portion of the parents' property. However, Devos, Lambrecht en Paping pointed out that, in practice, the estate of the parents was often given to one of the children (impartible inheritance), while the other children received their part of the inheritance in cash.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, Martine Segalen showed that, even in egalitarian inheritance systems, one son or daughter could be favored by the parents. This son or daughter could remain on the parent's estate and raise a family, but was expected to take care of the parents in old age.<sup>45</sup>

In old age, especially if a person became a widow(er), they could enter a third phase: going to live in an institutional environment or in another household, usually that of a son or daughter. If an old couple or widowed mother or father had one or more co-residing unmarried children, however, they usually continued to live in their house as (wife of) the household head. In the latter case, we can assume that the unmarried son or daughter provided and cared for the parent(s). For example, Petrus Augustus Joos was born in Belsele in 1765. In 1792 he married Marie Francisca Teirbroodt who was born and lived in the neighbouring municipality of Sinaai. Petrus Augustus probably moved to Sinaai shortly after marriage as all their seven children were born in Sinaai. One daughter died during childhood, five others got married and set up households of their own. At the end of his life – Petrus Augustus was about 81 years old at the time Sinaai introduced a population register on January 1, 1846 – he was living together with his spouse and unmarried daughter Isabelle Therese. When his spouse died in October 1846, Isabelle Therese continued to take care of her elderly father until his death in September 1847.

Table 6.2 shows a distinct difference in the household composition at death of the deaf and sibling widow(er)s. About 50 percent of the widowed siblings lived with one or more

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<sup>44</sup> Devos, I., Lambrecht, T. & Paping, R. (2011) "The Low Countries, 1000-1750" In: Vanhaute, E., Devos, I. & Lambrecht, T. (eds.) *Making a Living. Family, Income and Labour, Rural Economy and Society in North-Western Europe, 500-2000*. Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 166.

<sup>45</sup> Segalen, M. (1994) "La notion d'avantage dans les sociétés égalitaires" In: Segalen, M. & Ravis-Giordani, G. (eds.) *Les cadets*. Paris: CNRS, 195.

of their children – 72 percent if we ignore the unknown cases. They were either head of the household with co-residing unmarried child(ren) or they lived in the household of a married son or daughter. Obviously this was the case for young widow(er)s with young children, but the majority of the older widow(er)s also co-resided with (the families of) their children. For example, in 1857 the 68-year-old Angelina van Achter was living in Oudenaardseweg in Oordegem together with her second husband Joannes Baptista, who was recorded as head of the household. Their sons Engelbert and Jan, together with their spouses, children and a servant, were living in their house. They probably all worked on the family farm as all the adults were recorded as farmers. In 1862 Joannes Baptista died, making Angelina a widow and head of the household. In the next population register of 1867, Angelina was registered as living in Oude Heirweg in Oordegem (no migration was recorded in the previous register). From that time until her death in 1887, she lived with her son Joannes, his spouse and their six children, together with three servants. It is not indicated who was head of the household. The fact that Angelina had changed address, however, suggests that she went to live in the household of her son for support in old age.

**Table 6.2** Household composition at death, widowed/separated individuals, in %

N=	Deaf 19	Siblings 71
With unmarried child(ren)	10.5	35.2
In household married child	5.3	15.5
Institution	21.1	8.5
Other household type	42.1	11.3
Unknown	21	29.5
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

However, not all widowed siblings could rely on children in old age. The most important factor was whether a person had any living children to turn to. Serafina De Rubbel and Joanna Daens had no children in their marriages. So after the death of their husbands, they turned to a sibling for help. Serafina returned to the farm of her parents, which was by then inhabited and managed by her unmarried siblings Bruno, Franciscus and Sabina and her nephew Joseph Leopold Buysse. Joanna Daens moved from her hometown of Brussels to her place of birth Aalst to spend the last three years of her life in the household of her brother Albert, his wife and three of their children. Only on rare occasions did a widowed sibling live alone or with non-relatives in old age. Marie Pauline Heggerickx was 61 years old when she became a widow and head of the household in 1868. She was left with three adult children still living at home. However, all of them married and moved out between 1869 and 1873. Registered without an occupation in the

population register of 1867 and at her death in 1878, it is not clear how Marie Pauline provided for herself in the last five years of her life. Another ‘solution’ for people in old age and ill health was institutionalization. For example, Clementia Livina Drubbel lived on her own after the death of her husband in 1919. Her occupation as a seamstress seems to have provided her with the necessary resources to support herself. In 1924, however, when Clementia was 62 years old, she went to live in a home for the elderly run by the Sisters of Charity, where she died in 1930. The population register of 1921-1930 recorded that she moved to the institution “because of illness”.

A comparison with the deaf widowed individuals suggests that deaf widow(er)s were less likely to co-reside with children in old age. Only about 15 percent of the deaf widow(er)s died while co-residing with one or more children – 20 percent if the unknown cases are not taken into account. An important factor, as with the hearing siblings not co-residing with children, is the absence of (living) children. In the previous chapter I found that compared to their siblings, deaf couples had fewer children. With fewer children available, there were fewer opportunities to rely on their support in old age. However, even if a deaf widow(er) had living children, the children were apparently not always willing to take in their deaf father or mother. For example, the deaf Joseph Wesemael, born in Lebbeke in 1789, and his wife Maria Theresia Deck had twelve children. By the time Joseph became a widower in 1869, however, eight of his children had died and the remaining four had moved from his hometown of Wieze. His oldest daughter Virginie was living in Aalst when her mother died. The population register of 1867 recorded that Joseph moved from Wieze to Aalst in the spring of 1870, so it seemed likely that he went to live in the household of his daughter. However, according to the population register of Aalst, Joseph spent the last two years of his life – until his death in 1872 – living with a seemingly unrelated couple and another widower. It is unclear how the household supported itself, as they were all recorded without occupation. Similarly, the deaf widower August De Nagel turned to an institution of the Sisters of Charity in Ghent after the death of his wife in 1931 – although his 31-year-old daughter Marie Josephine Pharailde and her family were living nearby.

In contrast to the hearing widow(er)s without children, none of the deaf widow(er)s went to live with siblings in old age, despite the fact that most of them had living brothers and/or sisters nearby. More often, elderly deaf widow(er)s co-resided with non-relatives or lived in an institution. For example, August Theodore Teerlinck was 70 years old when his second wife died in 1918. Within a year of her death, August moved to the *Gesticht Lousbergs* (Lousberg Asylum) in Ghent, where he spent the final months of his life. Jean Baptist Van Damme, born deaf in Kalken in 1786, lost six of his eight siblings during childhood and both his parents before his 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. He married Sophia De Smet in 1825, but became a widower in 1836. In 1843 his only and unmarried daughter Joanna Catharina, a domestic servant, died in Lokeren. As Jean Baptist died before 1846,

I only know his living situation at death. The death certificate in 1845 specified that Jean Baptist was living in with his employer Livinus Van De Vijver. With hardly any living relatives to turn to, it seems plausible that Jean Baptiste had no choice but to live in with an unrelated family, earning his board and lodging as a labourer.

Based on the life trajectories of the hearing and deaf spouses, I conclude that the household formation of married deaf individuals and siblings was comparable. The married deaf generally set up an independent household later, but after marriage both disabled and hearing couples mainly lived in simple family households. At some point in their lives, deaf and hearing household heads could see their family in some way extended in some way to form a joint or stem family household, but generally this was only for a short period of time. Some differences between the deaf and hearing individuals did emerge during widowhood. Generally, the deaf had no or fewer children, so in old age they ended up more often in an institution or a household with non-relatives. Hearing widow(er)s without (living) children, on the other hand, more often turned to siblings. The deaf and hearing with children usually remained head of the household if they had a co-residing unmarried son or daughter, or they went to live in the household of a married son or daughter.

### **6.2.3.2 A life outside marriage**

The household formation cycle described above was common among the hearing siblings as on average 67 percent of the siblings got married. However, only about 17 percent of the deaf men and women entered marriage. According to cultural anthropologist Jessica Lee, nineteenth- and twentieth-century deaf girls looked to marriage “*for economic security unavailable to them otherwise*”.<sup>46</sup> So what were the options for the majority of unmarried deaf women and men? Who did they live with and how likely was it for them to become head of a household? The lack of systematic source material indicating household composition before the mid-nineteenth century prevents the reconstruction of the household formation cycles of the unmarried individuals in the first birth cohort. Generally it is only in the final years of their life, after the introduction of population registers, or at death, based on their death certificates, that I have an indication of their living arrangements. For the second birth cohort more complete household histories are available.

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<sup>46</sup> Lee, J. (2006) “Family Matters: Female Dynamics within Deaf Schools” In: Brueggemann, B.J. & Burch, S. (eds.) *Women and Deafness: Double Visions*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 16.

Table 6.3 presents the percentages of unmarried research individuals in each birth cohort with an unknown living situation, with a living situation only known at death and with a fairly complete household history. Due to the availability of population registers for the second birth cohort, the number of research individuals in this group with an unknown living situation or a living situation only known at death is much smaller. Individuals were classified in the category ‘unknown’ if no population registers were available and no information on their living situation was provided in the death certificate. The 33 deaf and 8 hearing individuals with an unknown household history are not taken into consideration in the remainder of this section.<sup>47</sup>

**Table 6.3** Information on household formation according to birth cohort, in %

	Birth cohort 1		Birth cohort 2	
	Deaf 111	Siblings 38	Deaf 124	Siblings 52
Unknown	17.1	13.2	11.3	5.8
Known at death alone	39.6	26.3	9.7	3.8
Complete	43.2	60.5	79	90.4
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

In this analysis, the focus is on research individuals with a complete household history. These household histories enable us to gain insight into the household formation cycles open to unmarried individuals, and the motives behind choices relating to co-residence and household composition. The percentages in the discussion below are thus based on the life trajectories of the 146 deaf and 70 hearing singles with a complete household history. The living situation of the individuals in the second category (known at death alone) is addressed separately.

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<sup>47</sup> I retrieved the death certificates of 184 (91 percent) of the remaining 202 deaf individuals, and 69 (84 percent) of the remaining 82 hearing individuals. The life course reconstruction of 18 deaf and 13 hearing individuals stopped prematurely due to migration out of the region or to an unknown place. The household histories of these individuals were reconstructed until the end of observation instead of until death. In this case, the categories are “Known at end observation alone” and “Complete (until end of observation)”.

**Table 6.4** Household cycle of singles with a complete household history according to gender, in %

	Deaf		Siblings	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
N=	76	70	45	25
<b>Living with parents until death</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Living with parents until they die</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>40</b>
<i>Afterwards:</i> Living in with sibling	12	41	6	10
Living together with siblings	55	47	50	80
Living in/together with relatives	9	3	6	0
Living in/together with non-kin	9	3	13	0
Living alone	3	3	25	0
Institutionalized	12	3	0	10
%	100	100	100	100
<b>Other household trajectory</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>
Living in/together with siblings	6	7	33	0
Living in/together with relatives	0	0	0	0
Living in/together with non-kin	0	0	0	100
Living alone	6	0	33	0
Institutionalized	76	93	33	0
Combination	12	0	0	0
%	100	100	100	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

According to Tamara Hareven, the basic axis of kin assistance, both in families living in nuclear households and in extended ones, was that of siblings with each other and parents with their children.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, table 6.4 confirms the important role of parents in the lives of unmarried children.<sup>49</sup> About 78 percent of unmarried deaf individuals lived in the parental household as long as possible, meaning until they themselves died or until both their parents died. In the sibling cohort, this figure rose to as high as about 94 per-

<sup>48</sup> Hareven, T.K. (2000) *Families, History and Social Change*, 57. Similarly, Catherine Capron and Michel Oris showed that in the nineteenth century many adult singles in the city of Liège lived in with their parents. Capron, C. & Oris, M. (2000) "Ruptures de cohabitation entre parents et enfants dans les villes et les campagnes du pays de Liège au 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle" In: Bourdelais, P., Bideau, A. & Légaré, J.(eds.) *De l'usage des seuils: structures par âge et âges de la vie*. Paris: Société de Démographie Historique, 229-69.

<sup>49</sup> The opposite was also true: unmarried children were an important source of support for elderly parents. Alter, G., Cliggett, L. & Urbiel, A. (1996) "Household Patterns of the Elderly and the Proximity of Children in a Nineteenth Century City: Verviers, Belgium, 1831-1846" In: Hareven, T.K. (ed.) *Aging and Generational Relations over the Life Course: A Historical and Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 30-42.

cent. Similar observations were made by Christa Matthys for singles living in nineteenth-century Assenede.<sup>50</sup> Alter and Capron too confirm that those with surviving parents and more siblings were more likely to stay at home.<sup>51</sup> Both the company of relatives, free housing and mutual care may have been important incentives for parents and single children to keep living together.<sup>52</sup> In theory, inheritance could not be used to pressure a child to stay in the parental household, since inheritance rules prescribed an equal division among the legitimate children. However, previously I argued that some families circumvented the equal division of property to the effect that one of the children took over the estate. The prospect of this inheritance may have encouraged children to stay as care-givers and providers for their parents.<sup>53</sup> In addition, one of the strategies of parents to keep their property intact, was to encourage permanent celibacy in their children.<sup>54</sup> This strategy resulted in the practice in which unmarried siblings continued to live together in the parental household, before and after the death of their parents (see below).

About 31 percent of the deaf singles and 57 percent of the hearing singles died in the house of their parents, with their father or widowed mother as head of the household. The difference of 26 percent in favour of the siblings can be related to the marriage pattern and the general practice in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for youngsters to stay in the parental household until marriage. In the previous chapter, I established that entering marriage was the obvious path for the vast majority of hearing people, in contrast to the deaf population. Still, about 33 percent of the hearing siblings died unmarried. Different factors, such as family demography and socio-economic status, may account for the permanently single status of a hearing person. However, an even more crucial factor was the timing of death. A premature death increased the probability of a person dying single, while a higher age at death improved the chances of a person get-

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<sup>50</sup> Matthys, C. (2003) *Ondergaan of ondernemen?: levensloonderzoek van de generatie van 1830/31 in Assenede*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished master's dissertation).

<sup>51</sup> Alter, G. & Capron, C. (2004) "Leavers and Stayers in the Belgian Ardennes" In: Van Poppel, F., Oris, M. & Lee, J.Z. (eds.) *The Road to Independence: Leaving Home in Western and Eastern Societies, 16th-20th Centuries*. Bern: Peter Lang, 138.

<sup>52</sup> Van Daalen, R. & De Regt, A. (1998) "Familiale hulp 1850-1950" In: Van Gerwen, J. et al. (eds.) *Studies over zekerheidsarrangementen. Risico's, risicobestrijding en verzekeringen in Nederland vanaf de Middeleeuwen*. Amsterdam: Nederlandsch Economisch Historisch Archief, 701-21.

<sup>53</sup> Lambrecht, T. (2012) "Unmarried Adolescents and Filial Assistance in Eighteenth-Century Flanders" In: Fertig, G. (ed.) *Social Networks, Political Institutions, and Rural Societies*. Turnhout: Brepols.

<sup>54</sup> Green, D.R. & Owens, A. (2004) "Introduction: Family Welfare and the Welfare family" In: Green, D.R. & Owens, A. (eds.) *Family Welfare: Gender, Property, and Inheritance Since the Seventeenth Century*. Westport: Praeger, 1-30.



ting married.<sup>55</sup> Of the unmarried siblings, 37 percent died before their 30<sup>th</sup> birthday – as opposed to 18 percent of the unmarried deaf individuals. A higher proportion of unmarried siblings died at a young age, as those that lived longer usually got married. As it was customary for men and women to live in their parents' house until marriage and many of the siblings died at a young age, it is no surprise that they were still living in their parents' house at the time of death. More unmarried deaf individuals reached old age, and therefore fewer of them were still living in their parents' house at death.<sup>56</sup>

Those unmarried men and women outliving their parents generally lived in the parental household until both their parents had died: 47 percent of the unmarried deaf and 37 percent of the unmarried siblings were still living with their widowed mother or father when that parent died. If a person lost both parents and was still unmarried, they had several options. For example, they could live in the household of a related or unrelated household head, or become head of the household themselves, whether or not in co-residence with relatives or non-kin. Another option was to enter an institution. Table 6.4 presents the living arrangements of the singles after they lost both parents.

Of those deaf and hearing individuals living with parents until the parents died, respectively 78 and 73 percent of the single people turned to a sibling. Female singles in particular tended to share a household with a sibling. Previous studies have confirmed the importance of siblings in the lives of singles and identified co-habitation with siblings as an important survival strategy.<sup>57</sup> The relationship between siblings could manifest itself in two types of household formation. On the one hand, an unmarried person could live in the household of a married brother or sister, who was (wife of) the household head. On the other hand, they could live together with other unmarried siblings, whereby all siblings were considered head of the household. In the latter case, they had usually already been living together in the parental house with their parents. Once their parents passed away, they continued to live together in the same house. Reasons of affections undoubtedly played a part, but economic considerations also encouraged siblings to share a household. Co-resident siblings could each contribute to the household income, making the household less vulnerable to periods of economic hardship. They could also

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<sup>55</sup> The age at death also influenced the marriage opportunities of deaf individuals, but not so strongly.

<sup>56</sup> The average age at death of the unmarried deaf individuals was 57.6 years, compared to 44.6 years in the sibling cohort.

<sup>57</sup> Oris, M., Ritschard, G. & Ryczkowska, G. (2005) "Siblings in a (Neo-)Malthusian Town. From Cross-Sectional to Longitudinal Perspectives" *Historical Social Research*, 30/3, 171-94; Bras, H. & Neven, M. (2007) "Mariage et décohabitation dans deux sociétés rurales (XIXe-XXe siècle). Frères et soeurs: rivaux ou solidaires?" In: Oris, M. et al. (eds.) *Les frateries. Une démographie sociale de la germanité*. Bern: Peter Lang, 181-218.

divide household tasks, keep each other company and take care of one another in illness and old age.

The second type of household formation appears to have been most common among both deaf and hearing singles. This living arrangement, in which unmarried siblings lived together in the family home, is called a *frèreche*. It was a way for single siblings to join forces and prevent the portioning of a possible inheritance.<sup>58</sup> Bernardus Neyt, born deaf in Knesselare in 1799, continued to manage the family farm after the death of his father in 1852 with his unmarried brother Karel. The brothers lived together until the death of Bernardus in 1870. Similarly, Coleta Martens, born deaf in Landegem in 1783 continued to live in the house of her parents until her death in 1864 with her unmarried brothers Jacobus and Joannes and two domestic servants. Her brothers managed the family farm, while she supplemented the family income by spinning. Most deaf and hearing singles continued to live with one or more unmarried siblings until their death (respectively 65 and 63 percent). However, a person could outlive his co-resident siblings or siblings could reach an age at which they could no longer support themselves, compelling them to change their living arrangements. For example, Eduardus De Cloedt, born deaf in Nevele in 1846, continued to live in his parents' house with his unmarried sisters Maria Francisca and Mathilde after the death of his widowed mother in 1884. In 1891 Mathilde married and left the household. Eduardus and Maria Francisca managed their household together, working as a tailor and seamstress, until Maria Francisca died in 1916. It is unclear how long Eduardus lived on his own (no migration was recorded in the population register for 1911-1920), but from January 1921 onwards he was definitely residing in the municipal hospital. He died in the same hospital in April 1930 at the age of 84. Faced with the death of his sister as a 70-year-old man, Eduardus was probably no longer capable of running the household by himself. Similarly, after the death of their widowed mother in 1917, the deaf sisters Ursula, Amelia and Rosalie continued to live in their mother's house, all contributing to the household income by lace-making. In 1933 Ursula died at the age of 72. Amelie and Rosalie continued to live together for another 15 years, until they moved to the Veilige Have retirement home in 1948, when they were 89 and 72 years old. They died there in 1949 and 1953.

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<sup>58</sup> De Kezel, L. (1988) "Grondbezit in Vlaanderen 1750-1850. Bijdrage tot de discussie over de sociaal-economische ontwikkeling op het Vlaamse platteland" *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis*, 61-102; Thoen, E. & Vanhaute, E. (1999) "The 'Flemish Husbandry' at the Edge. The Farming System on Small Holdings in the Middle of the Nineteenth Century" In: van Bavel, B.J.P. & Thoen, E. (eds.) *Land Productivity and Agro-Systems in the North Sea Area*. Turnhout: Brepols, 271-96.

12 percent of the deaf men, 40 percent of the deaf women and about 8 percent of the hearing singles chose the first type of household formation and went to live in the household of a married brother or sister after the death of a widowed parent. For example, the deaf sisters Joanna and Regina Bossaert were born in Wetteren in 1789 and 1798 into a family of seven children. In 1811, within the space of a month, they lost both their parents. Probably from earlier on, but definitely from 1825 (first population register available), they lived in the household of their sister Sophia, her husband and their six children. Sisterly love was probably an important factor in Sophia taking in her deaf sisters, especially with no parents present. However, economic considerations may also have been influential. From the perspective of the head of the household, we can assume that the co-resident sisters could contribute to the household income.<sup>59</sup> Joanna and Regina were registered as spinners in the population registers of 1830 and 1843, and as farmers in 1845 and 1847. From the perspective of the co-residing sisters, living in with a sibling may have provided a more secure alternative to a life on their own. Moreover, once old and unable to work, Joanna and Regina could rely on the care of her younger sister and nephews and nieces. Another example is provided by Andreas and Angelina De Backer, both born deaf in Erembodegem in the 1790s, who were probably living in with their mother until she died in 1841. In the population register of 1847, they were both living in the household of their brother Josephus, his wife Amelie and their six children. When Josephus died in 1864, they continued to live in the household of their sister-in-law, who headed the household. Amelie was 17 and 9 years younger than them, and could provide for their care, while Andreas and Angelina could contribute to the household income by helping out their nieces and nephews on the family farm – both were registered as a farmer in the population register of 1847.

After losing one's parents, siblings were thus the most obvious choice for co-residence for singles – either living together with them or living in their household. However, 22 percent of the deaf and 27 percent of the hearing singles did or could not turn to siblings. Singles not co-residing with siblings could live together with relatives or non-kin or they could live on their own or in an institution.

6 percent of the deaf and 4 percent of the hearing singles lived together with relatives.<sup>60</sup> Nephews especially appear to have been an important relation willing to take in single relatives. For example, Constantia De Schutter, born deaf in Denderhoutem in 1804, was

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<sup>59</sup> Amy Froide describes how co-residing single women could take care of elderly or sick relatives, act as substitute wives and mothers and be of financial assistance to the household in which she lived. Froide, A. (2005) *Never Married. Single Women in Early Modern England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 44.

<sup>60</sup> Percentages calculated in the group of deaf and hearing singles that lived with their parents until both parents had died.

registered in the household of her unmarried nephew Charles Louis and nephew Petrus, his wife and their four children in the population register of 1891 (first register available for Denderhoutem). She died in the same household in 1894 at the age of almost 90. Constantia probably lived in the household of her only surviving sibling Joannes until his death in 1875, after which she turned for support to her nephews. The old age at which Constantia entered the household of her nephews suggests that the reasons for taking in Constantia were mainly familial. Already 71 years old, she probably offered no economic benefit value to the household.

Another option was to live together with non-kin, as 6 percent of the deaf and 9 percent of the hearing singles did.<sup>61</sup> For example, Charles Louis De Backer was born deaf in 1858 as the sixth of nine children. Two of his brothers were also deaf. When his widowed father passed away in 1891, all his siblings had married, or migrated, or were institutionalized or had died. Without the option of co-residing with siblings, the 33-year old Charles Louis moved into the household of the family Collagé (parents and six children) with Hyppoliet Beerens (unrelated). The head of the household and Hyppoliet Beerens were both registered as shoemakers. Perhaps Charles Louis, who was educated at the deaf school in Ghent, lived and worked in this household as a shoemaker apprentice. This living situation, however, appears to have deteriorated as the next population register reports that Charles Louis was living in the Guislain Institute for the ‘insane’ in Ghent.<sup>62</sup> Generally, the singles living in with non-relatives were working as servants and living in with their employer.<sup>63</sup>

Maria Amelberga Vergauwen, who was born deaf and 53 years old when she lost both parents, followed a different path. Although she had four unmarried brothers still living in the parental household when her parents died, Maria Amelberga went to live on her own in a house about 3 kilometres from her brothers’ house. Apparently, her income as a seamstress provided enough income to support herself. In 1920, aged 70, she moved to another house, but still she lived by herself. By that time, she had been promoted to “naaister baas” (head seamstress), according to the population register. She died in her

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<sup>61</sup> Percentages calculated in the group of deaf and hearing singles that lived with their parents until both parents had died.

<sup>62</sup> The previous population register (1891-1900) makes no mention of the move of Charles Louis. It is therefore difficult to determine how long he resided in the household of the Collagé family.

<sup>63</sup> Anne Borsay describes how disabled people, especially persons with mental impairments, in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain were boarded out to non-related individuals on payment. Borsay, A. (2005) *Disability and Social Policy in Britain since 1750*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 178-9. According to H. Ronse a similar system existed in the Low Countries for the mentally ill. Ronse, H. (1988) “De geschiedenis van de psychiatrie te Geel” *Tijdschrift voor Psychiatrie*, 30/1, 6-20. I found no evidence of a boarding out system for deaf people in Flanders.

house in 1932 at the age of 82. Nonetheless, the life of Maria Amelberga is an exceptional life path for the deaf singles. Of the 22 percent of deaf individuals unable or unwilling to co-reside with siblings, only about 3 percent set up a single household. Among the single hearing brothers, on the other hand, it was most common to live on their own (25 percent). These figures indicate that it was less likely for deaf individuals to set up a solitary household.

Finally, 7 percent of the deaf and 4 percent of the hearing singles lived an institutional life after the death of both parents. In the course of the nineteenth century, it became more likely for deaf singles to live an institutional life after the death of both parents (9 compared to 4 percent). For many deaf and hearing singles institutionalization appears to have been a final survival strategy when one had no close relatives left to turn to.<sup>64</sup> After the death of his widowed father in 1865, the 32-year old deaf man Charles Louis Callens and his unmarried sister Emiliana went to live in the household of their married brother Eustachius in their hometown of Beveren. In 1870 Emiliana married and moved to Melsele to live with her husband. Charles Louis accompanied her and continued to live with her until her death in December 1901 (her husband had died in 1900). After her death, Charles Louis moved to Sint-Niklaas to reside in an institution until his death in 1902. Unmarried and childless, without parents or the possibility of relying on siblings, entering an institution was perhaps the only option for deaf men and women too old to support themselves.

Nonetheless, about 18 percent of the deaf singles entered an institution at a younger age, while one or both parents were still alive (see ‘other household trajectory’ in table 6.4). In the course of the nineteenth century especially, institutionalization at a younger age became more common. Were the parents of these deaf sons and daughters reluctant to take them in or was institutionalization the result of circumstances beyond their control? The following examples illustrate the difficulties of interpreting institutionalization. Jacques Jean Minne, born deaf in 1832 in Ghent, was 26 when he lost his father in 1858. He continued to live with his widowed mother Isabella Joanna and some unmarried siblings until November 1867. He then moved to the Guislain Institute, where he resided until his death in 1901. At the time that Jacques Jean moved to the institution his mother was 70 years old. Similarly, Edmond Van Waelvelde, born deaf in Zele in

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<sup>64</sup> Also Turner and Hutchison de-emphasized the role of institutions in the lives of the disabled: “*In spite of the expansion of institutional provision in the form of hospitals or workhouses, for the most part eighteenth-century people with physical or sensory impairments tended to be assisted in the community. The primary duty of care towards the disabled, elderly, or infirm lay within the family.*” Turner, D.M. (2012) *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England*, 130. “*Usually only a small proportion of people with disabilities spent a prolonged part of their lives within an institution. There were many who lived and died without ever experiencing such an environment.*” Hutchison I. (2007) *A History of Disability in Nineteenth-Century Scotland*, 169.

1858, moved to a hospice for indigent men in 1901, at the same time as his 70-year-old mother Seraphine went to live in a hospice for indigent women. Edmond and his mother probably managed to support themselves as long as they could both contribute to the household income. When Seraphine reached an age at which she was too old to work, the income earned by Edmond by gardening was perhaps not enough to maintain them. Indeed, in many of the cases where a deaf person was institutionalized, despite having one or two living parents, the parent(s) were usually over 60. As parents became older they became less active on the labour market and more in need of care themselves. This may have led to the decision to institutionalize their deaf son or daughter. Historians Tilly and Scott found that widows were sometimes obliged to place their children in special institutions out of economic considerations.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, Borsay argued that the decision to institutionalize one's disabled son or daughter should not be seen as "an abdication of responsibility", but as a "pragmatic response to economic need".<sup>66</sup>

Some life trajectories give no immediate indication as to why a person was institutionalized. Marie Therese De Pauw attended the *Institut des Sourdes-Muettes* in Ghent from 1853 to 1863. After her education she returned to the house of her parents, a day labourer and seamstress in their early fifties, in Temse. However, in October 1866 she returned to Ghent to live in the *Hospice des Incurables* (hospice for the incurable) run by the Sisters of Charity until her death in 1930. Yet, based on their young age, we can assume that Marie Therese's parents were still capable of supporting their daughter. Similarly, Jean Baptist Penneman was born deaf in Aalst in 1851. At the age of 7, he started attending the *Institut des Sourds-Muets*, the school for deaf boys in Ghent. After finishing his education in 1866, he remained in institutions of the Brothers of Charity (first in the deaf school, then from 1881 in the Guislain Institute) until his death in 1902. Nonetheless, his parents only died in the late 1870s and two of his siblings remained permanently single and resided in their parents' house their whole lives. It could have been that Marie Therese and Jean Baptist were institutionalized because their parents were reluctant to take in their deaf child. However, it could also be that deaf single men and women played a more active role in their institutionalization. Deaf men and women may have chosen to spend (part of) their lives in an institution. Marie Therese was an only child, who spent most of her childhood away from home. Without siblings and acquaintances to spend time with in her hometown, the institution of the Sisters of Charity may have been a more agreeable living environment. In Chapter 7, institutional living is explored in more detail.

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<sup>65</sup> Tilly, L.A. & Scott, J.W. (1987) *Les femmes, le travail et la famille*. Paris: Rivages, 70.

<sup>66</sup> Borsay, A. (2005) *Disability and Social Policy in Britain since 1750*, 177.

Based on the household histories of single deaf and hearing men and women, I conclude that the vast majority of singles relied on their parents for as long as possible. Either they died when they were still living with their parents or they lived with their parents until the parents died. Of those that outlived their parents, about three-quarters of the deaf and hearing singles co-resided with siblings. Most of them became head of a household which they shared with other unmarried siblings. A smaller proportion went to live in the household of a married brother or sister. If a deaf person was unable or unwilling to co-reside with siblings, they mostly entered an institution. Although institutionalization was largely influenced by the 'pool' of available kin, about one-fifth of the deaf singles were institutionalized at a time when they still had one or both their parents and/or living siblings. It is difficult to determine whether institutionalization was the result of the unwillingness of relatives to co-reside with a deaf family member or the result of a personal choice by the deaf individual. Hearing singles, on the other hand, were more likely to live in a single person household. There are no distinct differences in the household formation cycles of the first and second birth cohort, with the exception that more deaf individuals in the second cohort entered an institution (both after the death of their parents and when the parents were still alive). Nonetheless, co-residence with parents and siblings remained the most important survival strategy of deaf singles.

The household composition at death for those individuals for whom the household composition is only known at death (second category in table 6.3) reflects a similar pattern. Most deaf singles died either living in/together with siblings (30 percent) or institutionalized (30 percent). The median age at death of the singles who were living in an institution at death was 67. Except for three women, all had lost their parents by that time. As their siblings were about the same age, many of them were probably widowed and/or dependent on the support of relatives themselves, rendering it more difficult for them to co-reside with a deaf brother or sister. Co-residing with siblings was frequent among hearing singles as well, as 42 percent died living in/together with a sibling. 20 percent of the deaf singles and 42 percent of the hearing siblings died in the house of non-kin. In these cases, the death certificates mentioned that the person died in the house of an acquaintance or neighbour. It is unclear whether the deceased was living in the household of these acquaintances or neighbours at the time<sup>67</sup>, or in another (unknown) household. We only know the relation to the head of the household in the case of servants. For example, Petrus De Graeve, born deaf in Vinkt in 1791, died in 1834 in the house of his employer, the widow Van Ginder, for whom he worked as a servant.

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<sup>67</sup> The term 'neighbour' suggests that the deceased was living in the same neighbourhood, and not in the same household.

### 6.2.3.3 Differences according to region and occupation

In this final section on household formation and composition, I examine whether the household trajectories of singles differed according to region, and how co-resident singles may have contributed to the household they lived in. Only individuals who remained single their whole lives are taken into consideration, as I assume that the household formation cycles of married individuals were similar throughout the province and the role of spouses in their household was more obvious. For an overview of the occupations of the married deaf and hearing individuals, I refer to Chapter 4.

#### Household composition according to region

In her dissertation on the survival strategies of unmarried women, Sofie De Langhe showed that a single woman's household structure was determined by the socio-economic characteristics of the region in which she lived. Women living in inland Flanders were more frequently living in with relatives – in particular with parents and brothers – than single women living in the polder areas, who were more often living in the household of non-relatives. De Langhe put this difference down to the presence of the cottage industry in inland Flanders, which enabled single women to contribute to the family income. In the polder regions, the absence of a dominant cottage industry meant that opportunities for women to contribute to the family income were scarcer, so more single women left the parental household to work as a domestic servant in the household of a non-related household head.<sup>68</sup> De Langhe's findings suggest that characteristics of co-residence were to an important extent determined by economic considerations. Other scholars as well, emphasized the importance of the socio-economic context for co-residence with family.<sup>69</sup>

Starting from these observations, we can ask ourselves whether the household structure of singles who were deaf followed a similar pattern. On the one hand, we can assume that deaf single women faced the same conditions as other singles. On the other hand, deaf sons and daughters may have represented an even greater challenge for families as they were more often unemployed, and thus unable to financially contribute to the family income. Earlier I illustrated how the province of East Flanders can be divided into six districts (see 2.3.2): the northern districts of Eeklo and Sint-Niklaas, characterized by

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<sup>68</sup> De Langhe, S. (2013) *Oude vrijsters*, 86-7.

<sup>69</sup> Tilly, L.A. & Scott, J.W. (1978) *Women, Work and Family*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 8; Hill, B. (2001) *Women Alone. Spinners in England, 1660-1850*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 68; Lambrecht, T. (2009) "Peasant Labour Strategies and the Logic of Family Labour in the Southern Low Countries During the 18th Century" In: Cavaciocchi, S. (ed.) *The Economic Role of the Family in the European Economy from the 13th to the 18th Centuries*. Florence: Florence University Press, 637-50.



large commercial farms, and the inland districts of Ghent, Aalst, Dendermonde and Oudenaarde, characterized by a combination of intensive farming and a market-oriented home-based linen industry. The districts of Ghent and Oudenaarde, the centre of the linen industry, had the highest number of textile manufacturers.

**Table 6.5** Household cycle of deaf singles with a complete household history according to district, in %

	Aalst	Dendermonde	Eeklo	Ghent	Oudenaarde	Sint-Niklaas
N=	19	20	4	69	20	14
<b>Living with parents until death</b>	37	40	50	29	20	29
<b>Living with parents until they die</b>	53	45	50	44	50	57
<i>Afterwards:</i> Living in with sibling	50	22	50	20	30	25
Living together with siblings	20	67	50	57	40	63
Living in/together with relatives	0	11	0	7	10	0
Living in/together with non-kin	20	0	0	3	10	0
Living alone	0	0	0	3	0	12
Institutionalized	10	0	0	10	10	0
%	100	100	100	100	100	100
<b>Other household trajectory</b>	10	15	0	27	30	14
Living in/together with siblings	0	0	0	0	33	0
Living in/together with relatives	0	0	0	0	0	0
Living in/together with non-kin	0	0	0	0	0	0
Living alone	0	0	0	5	0	0
Institutionalized	100	100	0	84	67	50
Combination	0	0	0	11	0	50
%	100	100	0	100	100	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

In table 6.5, I present the household formation cycles of the 146 deaf singles with a complete household history, according to district. To confirm the impact of the socio-economic context on the household structure of the deaf, results should point to a higher number of deaf singles living in with family in the inland districts, as opposed to a higher number of deaf singles living in non-related households in Eeklo and Sint-Niklaas. The living arrangements without relatives are shaded.

The small population sizes in the districts of Eeklo and Sint-Niklaas prevent any firm conclusions. Nonetheless, based on the figures in table 6.5, I can make some tentative inferences. In all districts, most deaf singles lived with their parents until their parents or they themselves died. If an unmarried son or daughter outlived both parents, they

primarily co-resided with siblings. Living together with non-relatives or living alone were uncommon living arrangements for singles in all districts, including in the polder districts. Polder families were thus no more likely to send off their unmarried deaf offspring to live in non-related households. In contrast, we find a higher percentage of deaf singles leaving their parents' house prematurely in the linen districts of Ghent and Oudenaarde. Respectively 27 and 30 percent of the deaf singles in Ghent and Oudenaarde left the parental household when they still had one or both their parents and in most cases they were able to rely on siblings. The vast majority of these singles left the parental household to live in an institution. In 6.2.3.2, I suggested that institutionalization was probably not the result of the unwillingness of parents to take in a deaf family member, but often occurred when parents had reached old age. Nonetheless, the much higher institutionalization rate in Ghent and Oudenaarde suggests that contextual conditions cannot be overlooked. The presence of a school and institutions for deaf children and adults in the city of Ghent may have presented a welcome alternative to families no longer able to take in a deaf son or daughter. This suggests that families in the district of Ghent were more inclined to send their offspring to an institution as it was nearby. All the institutionalized deaf singles from Oudenaarde also resided in an institution in Ghent. For them, the proximity of the institution could not have been an incentive as Ghent was on average 29 kilometres from their hometown. Perhaps the high institutionalization rate of Oudenaarde and Ghent was related to the predominantly linen-oriented character of these districts. In section 2.3 and Chapter 4, I discussed the decline of the home-based cottage industry in the course of the nineteenth century. Unable to compete with cheap mechanically produced linen, families in textile regions found themselves struggling for survival. In this period of distress, it may have been easier to send a disabled son or daughter, who perhaps cost more money than they could earn, to an institution. After all, the costs of institutionalization were defrayed by local, provincial and national governments.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, previous research has identified migration of children away from the parental household as a strategy to deal with economic uncertainty.<sup>71</sup> Desiré Verhoeven was born deaf in Ghent in 1844, the son of Camiel, a weaver, and Maria Henrica Mortier, who had no registered occupation. When he was 11 he lost his mother. Desiré continued to live with his widowed father and brothers until 1867, when he entered an institution run by the Brothers of Charity in Ghent. Similarly, Petrus De Backer, born deaf in Sint-Maria-Lierde in the district of Oudenaarde, was the son of a farmer and a spinner. In 1879, when both his parents were still alive, he moved

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<sup>70</sup> More information on the payment of the tuition fees of deaf schools can be found in section 2.1.1.4. Sections 4.5.1. and 7.2 discuss the organization and payment of institutional care.

<sup>71</sup> E.g. Dribe, M. (2004) "Leaving Home as a Family Strategy in Times of Economic and Demographic Stress. The Case of Rural Scania, Sweden 1829-1866".

to Ghent to reside in an institution of the Brothers of Charity. In both examples the parents of the unmarried deaf person were engaged in textile manufacturing at the time their son entered an institution. However, we should be careful about relating socio-economic conditions to institutionalization as not all children of spinners and/or weavers were institutionalized, nor did all institutionalized deaf singles have parents working in the textile industry. The parents of Louis Felix Remue, for example, were a carpenter and a shopkeeper when Louis Felix moved from Ghent to Bruges to enter an institution of the Brothers of Charity. Undoubtedly, several factors, and not only economic ones, led to the institutionalization of a deaf person.

### Occupations of the co-resident singles

We could examine the occupations of the parents and siblings in whose households the unmarried deaf men and women resided to reconstruct the conditions under which families were able to take in a deaf family member. However, previous analyses have shown that the vast majority of deaf singles could fall back on parents and siblings for co-residence. Therefore, it seems unlikely that the occupation of the parents or siblings was the decisive factor in opting for co-residence.<sup>72</sup> This assumption is backed up by the distribution of the occupations of the fathers of the deaf singles who lived with their parents until their parents or they themselves died. We find that 43, 13, 37 and 7 percent of the fathers were registered respectively in agriculture, unskilled labour, crafts and other occupations (administration and trade and transport).<sup>73</sup> The differences between the occupational sectors are not reflected in different attitudes towards co-residence with a deaf son or daughter, but rather reflect the general distribution of the fathers over the different occupational sectors.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> In periods of economic crisis the occupation of the parents may be of greater importance, as the previous analysis suggests.

<sup>73</sup> These percentages are calculated based on the occupations of 98 fathers. The occupation of the fathers is unknown for 16 of the 114 deaf singles who lived with their parents for as long as possible.

<sup>74</sup> Taking into account all the fathers with a known occupation, we find that 36 percent of the fathers worked in agriculture, 17 percent in unskilled labour, 40 percent in crafts and 6 percent in trade and transport or administration. Richard Wall also observed few differences between families of farmers, labourers, textile workers and craftsmen regarding the moment at which children left the household. However, he and others did find differences between sons and daughters. Daughters of farming families generally left the parental household sooner than sons. In families of labourers and craftsmen more daughters stayed on in the parental home. Wall, R. (1983) "Does Owning Real Property Influence the Form of the Household? An example from Rural West Flanders" In: Wall, R., Robin, J. & Laslett, P. (eds.) *Family Forms in Historic Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 379-407; Bras, H. & Neven, M. (2002) "Mariage et décohabitation dans deux sociétés rurales (XIXe-XXe siècle). Frères et soeurs: rivaux ou solidaires?".

However, focusing on the occupations of the unmarried deaf persons themselves may provide insight into the ways in which deaf singles may have chipped in to help with the household income. The most common living arrangement for deaf singles was to live in the parental household, or the household of a sibling or together with other unmarried siblings. These three types of living situation are analysed below. Living in an institutional setting was common among deaf singles as well, but this type of living situation is dealt with in more detail in Chapter 7.

Figures 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 present the distribution over the different occupational sectors of the deaf and hearing singles while living respectively in the parental household, in a sibling's household and together with one or more siblings. In the graphs, I distinguish between seven categories of occupations. Individuals could 1) have no registered occupation, 2) be registered explicitly "without occupation", 3) have a job in agriculture, 4) be an unskilled labourer, 5) be employed in textile manufacture, 6) be involved in the clothing trade, or 7) work in another sector (other crafts, trade and transport, administration, domestic service<sup>75</sup>). As I am taking into account individuals without a registered occupation, I am only including individuals aged 15 and over in the graphs because a person's economically active period is considered to begin at 15. Taking into account younger individuals would result in an over-representation of individuals without a registered occupation.<sup>76</sup> A second important observation is that the graphs take into account the occupation at each moment of registration of the household.<sup>77</sup> For example, Marie Sophie De Meire, born deaf in Mater in 1849, lived with her parents from birth until the death of her widowed father in 1902. During that period she was registered in the population registers of 1847, 1857, 1867, 1881, 1891 and 1901. The population registers of 1847 and 1857 were not taken into account as Marie was younger than 15 at the time of registration. In the population register of 1867 she was registered as a dressmaker. In 1881, 1891 and 1901 she was working as a glove maker. Marie is thus included four times in figure 6.1. Thus the percentages mentioned in the discussion below always refer to the number of records and not to the number of individuals.<sup>78</sup> Due to the absence of population registers, occupational records for the first birth cohort are

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<sup>75</sup> These occupations represent only a small proportion of the population and are therefore combined into one category.

<sup>76</sup> In the graphs, no age barrier was needed for representing the singles living in or together with siblings (figures 6.2 and 6.3) as none of them was living in or together with siblings (without a parent present) before their 15<sup>th</sup> birthday.

<sup>77</sup> This implies the registration in population registers and death certificates, as these are the two sources that generally record an occupation.

<sup>78</sup> For the general flow of the text, however, I speak of individuals instead of occupational records.

scarcer. In most cases, I only know the living arrangement and occupation at the time of death.

**Figure 6.1** Occupation of individuals living in with parents, in %



Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Figure 6.1 presents the distribution over the different occupational sectors of the deaf and hearing singles while living in the parental household.<sup>79</sup> The high number of singles living with their parents with no registered occupation or without occupation indicates that living in with parents was strongly correlated to the absence of a formal occupation in the sources. This observation is consistent with findings in Chapter 4 that individuals who were unemployed were mostly living in.<sup>80</sup> The lack of a formal occupation does not, however, rule out the possibility that deaf and hearing singles contributed to the household economy in other ways.<sup>81</sup> Based on the occupations of the parents, we find that most of the parents of the singles without a registered occupation were engaged in

<sup>79</sup> Figure 6.1 takes into account 256 moments of registration for 129 deaf singles living in with their parents; 95 moments of registration for 48 siblings.

<sup>80</sup> In 4.3.2.2 I showed that the vast majority of unemployed deaf men and women were living in with family or in an institution.

<sup>81</sup> Devos, I., De Langhe, S. & Matthys, C. (2014) "Lost in Registration? Missing Occupations of Single Women in the Bruges Countryside, c.1814" *The History of the Family*, 59–80.

agriculture or textile manufacturing.<sup>82</sup> This indicates that most singles without a registered occupation lived in a household in which resources from agriculture were combined with a supplementary income from the cottage industry. We can assume that deaf and hearing singles alike did their bit to help with household activities such as farm work, taking care of cattle, weaving and spinning. The informal character of this wide range of tasks may account for the high incidence of unregistered occupations among the singles. Still, one-third of the singles without an occupation lived in a household headed by parents with a different occupation type. A fair number of mothers, and to some extent fathers, were registered as an innkeeper or shopkeeper. 20 to 30 percent of the singles had a father who was a craftsman – mainly in the food or construction sector or involved in the manufacture of items such as paper, ropes and metal. 17 percent of the deaf singles had an unskilled labourer as father (as opposed to none of the hearing singles). For these occupation types, it is more difficult to assess the tasks single sons or daughters living at home may have taken on. Several examples suggests that co-residing children may have assisted their parents with their work. For example, Alphonse Lefebvre, born deaf in Elversele in 1858, lived in with his parents who were registered as shopkeepers and pedlars. In the conscription register of 1878, Alphonse was registered as a pedlar as well. However, none of the population registers (1867, 1881, 1891 and 1901) during the period when he was living in with his parents mentioned an occupation. Even so, it seems likely that Alphonse assisted his parents in running the shop. His mother died in 1887 and all but one of his siblings departed between 1892 and 1898, so then his help may have been a welcome bonus to his unmarried sister and widowed father. In addition, some may have worked in unskilled labour without their occupation being registered. For example, Livinus Pieters, born deaf in Ghent in 1847, lived in his parents' house until his death in 1882. Both his parents were factory workers. His family situation was probably far from favorable as Livinus' father Josephus Joannes was convicted several times for defamation, public drunkenness and swearing, among other things. Only in his death certificate was Livinus registered as a factory worker. He had probably worked as an unskilled labourer before in his adult life, but perhaps on a more irregular basis as this was not recorded in the population registers. The opportunities for single women to work in the household were presumably more extensive as they could do household chores and take care of young or older family members. This may

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<sup>82</sup> 67 percent of the single brothers had a father who was either registered as a farmer or in the textile sector. Similarly about half of the deaf single men's fathers were involved in agriculture or in textile manufacturing. The single sisters without a registered occupation were mainly living in with fathers who were farmers (43 percent) and mothers who worked as spinners, seamstresses or farmers (85 percent). Moreover, 74 percent of the mothers of the deaf single women were employed in agriculture or textile manufacture, as were 45 percent of the fathers.

have been the case for Florence De Rijcke, who was born deaf in 1843. Florence lived in her parents' house, together with her siblings, until 1872, when she moved from Ghent to Lovendegem. In the population registers of 1857 and 1867 no occupation was recorded for Florence; her parents were recorded as a factory worker and a spinner. To contribute to the family household, Florence may have helped her mother with spinning. In addition, she may have helped her siblings in caring for their children.<sup>83</sup>

Of those with a registered occupation, agriculture was the major occupation for deaf men in both birth cohorts, with the clothing sector increasing in importance in the second cohort. In 67 percent of the cases in which a deaf single man was registered as a farmer, his father was or had also been a farmer and his mother was usually recorded as a farmer or spinner. 25 percent of the deaf clothing artisans living with their parents had a father who was also working in the clothing sector. The vocational training to produce clothing craftsmen in the deaf schools, which the vast majority of deaf men in the second birth cohort attended, may explain why fewer deaf men followed in the footsteps of their fathers in the second birth cohort. 24 percent of the deaf women in the first birth cohort were registered as a spinner, but in the second cohort the emphasis shifted towards the clothing sector (22 percent). For at least 73 percent of the deaf spinners, their mothers were also engaged in the textile industry. Like the deaf single men, fewer single women in the second birth cohort had the same occupation as their mothers. More deaf women were engaged in the clothing industry, while their mothers were more often working as farmers or spinners.

Among the single brothers with a registered occupation, the most popular jobs were in agriculture followed by unskilled labour. The single farmers probably worked on the family farm as all their fathers were farmers too. The occupational profile of the fathers of the single unskilled labourers is more diverse. The single men probably worked outside the house, but contributed financially to the household income. Only two single sisters in the first birth cohort had a registered occupation at one point in time. Marie Nielemans was registered as a seamstress in the population register of 1838 – in the preceding population registers no occupation was registered. She was probably helping her mother, who was also a seamstress, before 1838 as well. Anna Catharina Merkaerd was recorded as a spinner when she died in the house of her parents in 1809. In the second birth cohort, single sisters mainly worked as lace workers in the textile industry (17

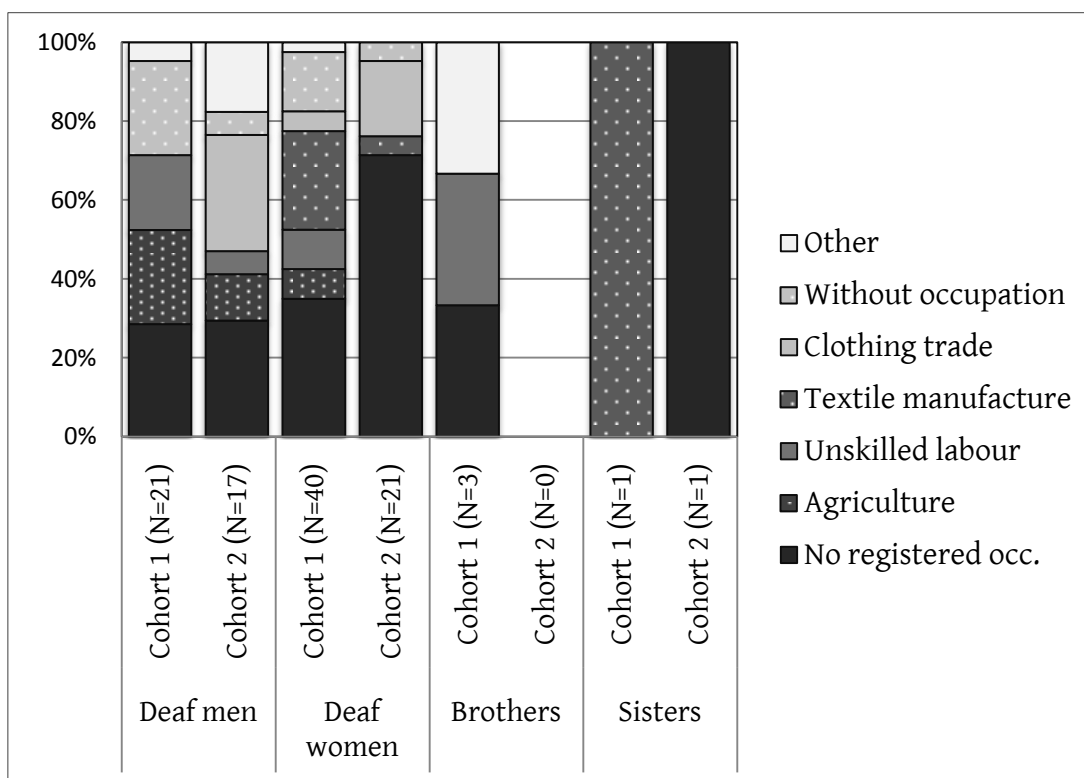
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<sup>83</sup> In the period between 1862 and 1870, her parents' household was extended several times by the arrival of illegitimate nieces and nephews, and the households of her married sisters Sophie and Philomena, who temporarily returned to their parents' house. In such an extended household, there were presumably enough household chores in which Florence could engage

percent) or in agriculture (13 percent). Their parents displayed a similar occupational profile (either as farmers or textile workers).

After the death of their parents, unmarried men and women were most likely to live together with one or more siblings, either in the household of a married sibling or together with other unmarried sibling(s). As with the analysis above, I looked at the occupations of the singles living in with siblings (figure 6.2) and living together with siblings (figure 6.3). The first living arrangement with siblings was a less popular option, which translates itself into the low population sizes in figure 6.2. For the hearing cohorts especially, the numbers are too small to make generalizations. The bars for the hearing singles are included in figure 6.2, but are not discussed further.<sup>84</sup>

**Figure 6.2** Occupation of individuals living in with siblings, in %



Source: MS Access database, research individual file

As with the singles living in with their parents, the majority of the deaf singles living in with a sibling (about 67 percent) had no registered occupation or was recorded as without occupation. As in the living situation with parents, however, we can assume that the singles contributed to the household in which they lived in an informal way by helping on the family farm, taking on household chores or assisting siblings in their professional

<sup>84</sup> Figure 6.2 takes into account only 5 moments of registration for 5 siblings.



activities. After the death of her father and stepmother, the deaf Marie Becque moved into the household of her only surviving sibling, Adrianus. In June 1848, the 61-year-old Marie died in the household of Adrianus, his wife and their four children. In the death certificate of her illegitimate child (1812) and her death certificate, Marie was registered as a spinner. The population register in between, when she was living in Adrianus' household, mentioned no occupation. However, it seems likely that Marie had worked as a spinner her whole life. Marie and her sister-in-law Anna Livina, who was also a spinner, probably tried to supplement Adrianus' income as a farm worker by working in the cottage industry.

The deaf single men with a registered occupation were mainly employed in agriculture (24 percent) or unskilled labour (19 percent) in the first birth cohort. In the second cohort agriculture (12 percent) and unskilled labour (6 percent) lost importance in favour of the clothing sector (29 percent). All deaf single men registered as farmers were living in with a sibling who was also registered as a farmer. The deaf single men most probably helped on the family farm of their brother or brother-in-law. Similarly, all unskilled labourers lived in the household of a sibling who was also a day labourer or worker. The shoemakers in the second birth cohort lived in with siblings who were all farmers. Trained as shoemakers during their education, they may have run a shoemakers workshop in the houses of their siblings. The deaf single women with an occupation were mainly registered as spinners (25 percent) or as day labourers (10 percent) in the first birth cohort, as seamstresses (19 percent) in the second. All the spinners lived together with a sibling or a sister-in-law who was also a weaver or spinner. The siblings of the single unskilled workers and seamstresses exhibited a more varied occupational profile.

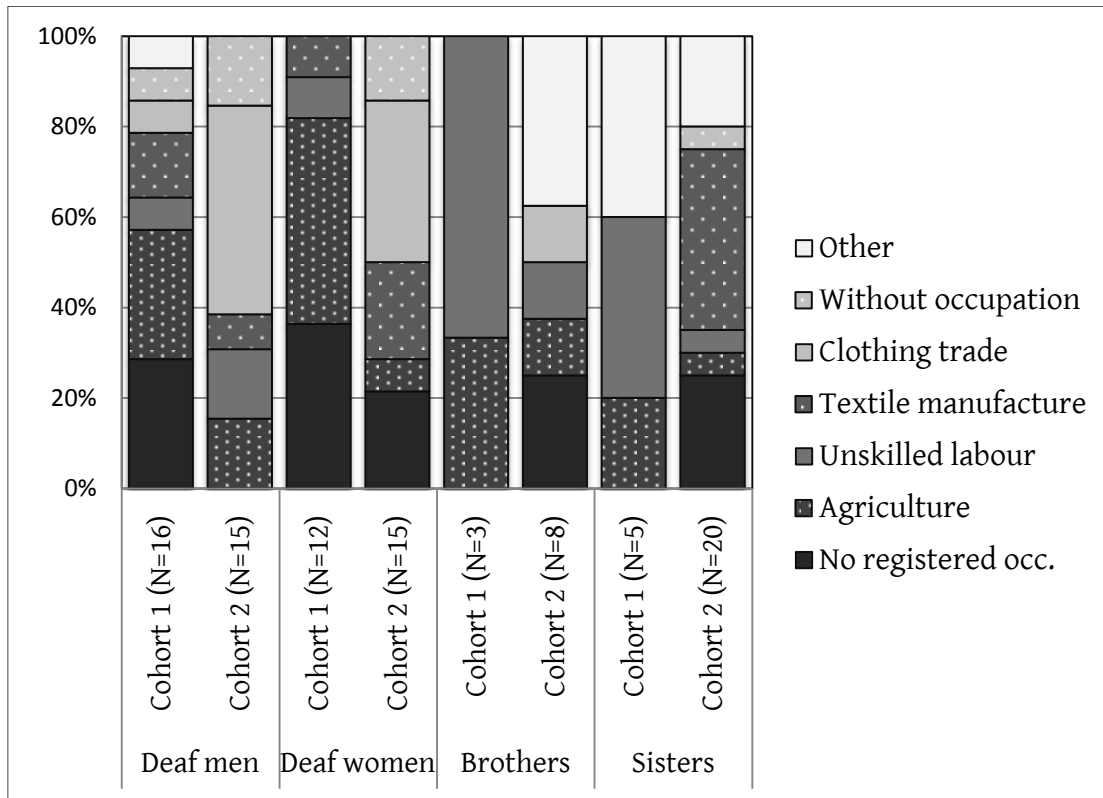
Finally, figure 6.3 presents the occupational records for the deaf and hearing singles living together with one or more siblings as head of the household.<sup>85</sup> The bars display an occupational profile that differs from the singles above in two ways. First, the number of deaf and hearing singles without a registered occupation was considerably lower compared to the singles living in with parents or siblings. On average, 83 percent of the sources recorded an occupation for the singles living together with siblings. The lack of registration was slightly higher in the deaf female cohort – an average of 29 percent across both birth cohorts – than in the deaf male and hearing cohorts – an average of between 13 and 15 percent. Second, the representation of the singles in the occupational sectors is somewhat different compared to the singles in the previous analyses. Deaf single women in the first birth cohort, for example, were much more frequently

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<sup>85</sup> Figure 6.3 takes into account 53 moments of registration for 30 deaf singles; 36 moments of registration for 16 non-disabled siblings.

registered as farmers (46 percent) compared to single women living in with parents or sibling(s) (10 and 8 percent). The small population sizes, however, necessitate a cautious approach to these findings.

**Figure 6.3** Occupation of individuals living together with siblings, in %



Source: MS Access database, research individual file

The higher registration of occupations for the singles living together with siblings suggests that town officials were more likely to register an occupation when a single person was living independently (as opposed to a person living in). A closer look at those individuals with a registered occupation indicates that other factors like gender and the composition of the household may also have been important for the registration of an occupation.<sup>86</sup> For all but three single men (two deaf and one hearing) living together with other unmarried siblings, the population registers recorded an occupation. For the men, we find no differences in registration according to household composition. Single men with an occupation could be living together with just one unmarried sibling or in large sibling households, whether or not extended with other relatives and non-relatives. Only for the deaf single brothers Bruno and Franciscus De Rubbel did the

<sup>86</sup> The relationship between the registration of employment for unmarried women and variables such as household composition has been analysed by: De Langhe, S. (2013) *Oude vrijsters*, 218-317.

population registers mention no occupation. After the death of their widowed mother in 1854, Bruno and Franciscus continued to live on the parental farm together with their deaf sister Sabina, widowed (and hearing) sister Seraphina and their cousin Joseph Leopold. The population register of 1857 mentioned no occupation for all the De Rubbel children. Instead, the register recorded “deaf-mute” in the occupation column next to the names of Bruno, Franciscus and Sabina. However, in their death certificates, they were all recorded as farmers. The De Rubbel children most probably worked as farmers their whole lives, but perhaps the town clerks found it more important to note that three of the De Rubbel children were deaf than to register their work on the family farm. Among the hearing single brothers, only Carolus Josephus Mouton was registered once without an occupation while living together with siblings. At time of the population census in 1891, Carolus Josephus was living in Desteldonk with his unmarried brothers Petrus Franciscus and Ferdinand (died in 1897), and his unmarried sisters Rosalie (died in 1896) and Virginie. All but Carolus Josephus were registered as a worker or day labourer. For Carolus Josephus the register mentioned no occupation. In the next population register (1901), Carolus Josephus, and his siblings were recorded as farm day labourers. It is unclear why Carolus Josephus was registered without occupation in the population register of 1891. He was probably working as an unskilled labourer during that period as well.

Among the single women, household composition seems to have been more important for the registration of employment. The sources recorded an occupation at each registration for respectively 57 and 78 percent of the deaf and hearing women. All of these women were living in a household consisting of at least one other unmarried woman, which could be a sister, an illegitimate daughter or a non-relative. Besides the presence of another unmarried woman, the households were mainly composed of unmarried brothers, sometimes extended with nieces and nephews and/or domestic servants. The 35-year-old deaf woman Anna Maria Vanhoogendorp continued to live in the house of her parents after the death of her widowed mother in 1844, together with her widowed brother Karel Lodewijk, unmarried brother David, and her illegitimate daughter Rosalie and Rosalie’s illegitimate son Augustin. All the family members were registered as manual workers. After the marriage of Rosalie in 1856, Anna Maria and her brother Karel Lodewijk went to live in the household of Rosalie, where Anna Maria died in 1868. In the period 1856-1868 the population registers recorded no more occupations for Anna Maria and Karel Lodewijk. However, they probably continued to work as manual workers since this occupation was recorded in their death certificates. This example clearly shows the difference in the registration of employment for persons living independently and those living in: Karel Lodewijk and Anna Maria were registered with an occupation when they were heading their own household, but had no registered occupation when living in the household of their niece/daughter Rosalie.

In contrast, the 43 and 22 percent of deaf and hearing women without a registered occupation were living together with only male household members – in all cases with one or more unmarried brothers, sometimes also with an illegitimate son, nephew or uncle. Rosalie De Baere, for example, was born deaf in Deurle in 1856. After the death of her widowed mother in 1905, she continued to live in the parental house with her unmarried brother Seraphinus and their 69-year old servant Angelus Van Den Broecke. Angelus died in January 1915 and was substituted by Valere De Baere in February 1915. Rosalie continued to live together with her brother and Valere until her death in 1938. At the time of death, she was registered without occupation. While Seraphinus was always registered as a miller in the population registers, no occupation was mentioned for Rosalie. Sofie De Langhe found a similar pattern in the Liberty of Bruges and put forward the proposition that women without a registered occupation who were living together with one or more unmarried brothers were engaged in the care of their brother(s) by managing the household as substitute for a wife or mother.<sup>87</sup> Thus, like the female spouses for whom the population registers often recorded no occupation, single women living together with one or more unmarried brothers were considered to be taking on the informal occupation of ‘housewife’, which resulted in the absence of a formal occupation in the sources.

Based on the analyses in this final section, I conclude that the household formation cycle did not differ distinctly according to district. In all the districts, singles mainly lived with their parents until their parents or they themselves died, after which they turned to siblings. However, the linen districts of Ghent and Oudenaarde did show evidence of a higher institutionalization rate among the deaf singles. I suggested that this was on the one hand related to the proximity of a strong institutional system for the deaf in the district of Ghent and on the other to the difficulties families in the cottage industry faced in the middle of the nineteenth century. The more difficult struggle for survival in the linen-orientated families may have persuaded parents to send their deaf son or daughter to an institution. Relating household composition to living situation, I found that the singles living in with parents or siblings were the ones who most often had no registered occupation or were registered as without occupation. Based on the occupations of the parents and siblings, however, I have argued that the singles were probably involved in informal labour activities such as assisting their parents or siblings with farm work, spinning and managing the household. This assumption is reinforced by the observation that singles with a registered occupation usually exercised the same occupation as (one of the) parents, sibling or sibling-in-law. In the second birth cohort, however, deaf singles were more often registered in a type of occupation – more particularly

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<sup>87</sup> De Langhe, S. (2013) *Oude vrijsters*, 317.

in the garment sector – different to that of the other household members. I have related this divergence to the development of deaf schools, which provided the deaf individuals with vocational training.<sup>88</sup> For the singles living together with other siblings, occupational records in the sources were more common. Single men in particular almost always had a registered occupation. For women, registration was dependent on the household structure. If a single woman was living in an exclusively male household, the sources generally recorded no occupation. If at least one other woman was present in the household, an occupation was registered. There was no distinct difference in the lack of employment registration between the deaf singles and their siblings.

Besides the three types of living arrangement presented in figures 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3, singles could also live in or together with other relatives or non-relatives (leaving aside institutionalization). As with the previous findings, we find a clear distinction between individuals living in and individuals living independently when it comes to the registration of employment. Of the deaf singles living in with relatives and non-relatives, respectively 80 and 56 percent had no recorded occupation or were registered as unemployed. In contrast, the majority of deaf singles living together with relatives and non-relatives had a registered occupation (60 percent).

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<sup>88</sup> However, it is still possible that despite being registered as a shoemaker or seamstress, which was the most common occupation among the deaf singles, the deaf singles were actually more involved in assisting household members in their occupations.

## 6.2.4 Migration

Related to household formation and composition is the event of migration. Indeed, a person can migrate inside and outside municipalities as a member of a household, to set up a new household or to live in the household of others. Or in the words of historian Leslie P. Moch, “*migration systems were rooted in extant demographic regimes and family formation systems*”.<sup>89</sup>

### 6.2.4.1 The study of migration: sources and their limitations

The analysis of migration patterns is complicated by both source-related problems and event-related problems. In Chapter 2, I elaborated on the problem of ‘disappearing’ individuals in the sources. Before the introduction of population registers, migration was not registered. People who moved temporarily from their hometown, as for example in seasonal migration or as part of life-cycle service, but were born, married and died in the same town, appear to have lived a sedentary life in the sources. Individuals permanently migrating outside a municipality left no more traces in the vital registration of the town of departure. So although the absence of a death certificate can indicate that a person left town during their life, the timing and destination remain unknown. As most migrants moved to a nearby municipality, usually an adjacent town, one option would be to look for the person in the civil records of neighbouring municipalities.<sup>90</sup> The time-consuming nature of this undertaking, however, forced me to stop the life course reconstruction of migrants with an unknown destination. In the period before population registers became available, I only have an indication of a person’s residence at birth, marriage and death. If an event occurred after 1796, the certificate usually records a street name in addition to the name of the municipality. Based on the incidence of different street names in, for example, a person’s marriage certificate and the birth certificates of their children, it is possible to reconstruct movements *within* a municipality. Nonetheless, migration in the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century is inevitably under-registered as persons could move unnoticed in between life events. When population registers became available, it made it more feasible to track migrants. As individuals were required to notify the town council when they left and arrived in a

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<sup>89</sup> Moch, L. P. (1995) “Moving Europeans: Historical Migration Practices in Western Europe” In: Cohen, R. (ed.) *The Cambridge Survey of World Migration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 126.

<sup>90</sup> Jaspers and Stevens showed that at the end of the eighteenth century about 80 percent of the migrants moved to a place within a 10 kilometre radius of their point of departure. Jaspers, L. & Stevens, C. (1985) *Arbeid en tewerkstelling in Oost-Vlaanderen op het einde van het Ancien Regime. Een socio-professionele en demografische analyse*. Ghent: Provinciebestuur Oost-Vlaanderen.

municipality, so that amendments could be made to the population registers, they could be followed across their different residences. In case of the deaf individuals, however, as I discussed in 2.1.2.5, moving to an institution was often not recorded as they remained domiciled in the house of their parents (or other relatives). This constitutes an additional problem in the reconstruction of the migratory behaviour of the research population.

Event-related problems are due to the complex nature of migration. People can migrate several times during their lives, over various distances, in multiple ways (alone, as part of a family, etc.) and for different reasons. These factors turn migration into an event that is difficult to chart. A person's reasons for migration are especially hard to uncover. Every migration can be considered the result of a decision based on a person's circumstances. These circumstances are determined by the migrant themselves and/or their socio-economic context.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, migration is the result of both a personal decision (*human agency*) and context-bound push and pull factors – for example the death of one's parents or a higher demand for labour in the place of destination. Scholars have identified different driving forces for migration. On a macro scale, scholars of migration point to economic factors and demographic characteristics such as primary determinants of migration: the demand for labour in the countryside and in cities, population pressure, deployment of capital and landholding regimes.<sup>92</sup> Nineteenth-century industrialization processes had a major effect from the macro-level perspective. As industrialization advanced, more and more people moved over larger distances, primarily to urban and industrial areas, and tended to stay at their new industrial destination.<sup>93</sup> At the meso level, which includes the local and social aspects of migration, numerous scholars have highlighted the role of social networks in migration.<sup>94</sup> Kin could play a mediating role in the process of migration by encouraging relatives to move or by moving first (*chain migration*). Besides via family and friends, migration information could also be conveyed via less personal channels such as recruitment offices, transport com-

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<sup>91</sup> Vikström, L. (2003) *Gendered Routes and Courses. The Socio-Spatial Mobility of Migrants in Nineteenth-Century Sundsvall, Sweden*. Umea: Umea University (unpublished PhD dissertation), 16.

<sup>92</sup> Moch, L.P. (1999) "Dividing Time: An Analytical Framework for Migration History Periodization" In: Lucassen, J. & Lucassen, L. (eds.) *Migration, History Migration, History: Old Paradigms and New Perspectives*. Bern: Lang, 43.

<sup>93</sup> Vikström, L. (2003) *Gendered Routes and Courses*, 18.

<sup>94</sup> Anderson, M. (1971) *Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire*. London: Cambridge University Press; Hareven, T.K. (1982) *Family Time and Industrial Time: The Relationship between the Family and Work in a New England Industrial Community*. New York: Cambridge University Press; Janssens, A. (1993) *Family and Social Change: The Household as a Process in an Industrializing Community*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

panies, printed texts and rumour.<sup>95</sup> At the micro level, individual characteristics are considered influential: for example age, gender, social status and education, and individual decision-making opportunities. The interaction between these three levels determines the migration behaviour of individuals.<sup>96</sup>

The aim of this section is not to provide a comprehensive overview of the character of migration in East Flanders in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Macro-level developments have been briefly discussed in Part 1 of this study, and are not my main interest. Instead, the focus is on the differences between the migration behaviour of deaf individuals and hearing individuals. I present the migration behaviour of the research individuals in a quantitative way, by looking into the types, frequency and distance of migration, and shed some light on the motives behind migration, based on biographical examples.

#### 6.2.4.2 Migration in numbers: types, frequency, duration, destination and distance

To transform the diverse group of migrants into a comprehensive and analysable entity, I start by drawing up some basic rules for analysis that are applied throughout this section. First, I distinguish between five categories in the analysis: 1) *sedentary* individuals, 2) individuals migrating only within a municipality (*inside migration*), 3) those moving between municipalities (*out-migration*), 4) individuals combining inside migration and out-migration, and 5) those individuals with an *unknown* migration history. Individuals in the category *unknown* were born and (married and) died in the same municipality, but the sources mention no addresses, which makes it uncertain whether they did migrate within the municipality or led a sedentary life. Second, individuals for whom I found no death certificate in their place of birth are assumed to have out-migrated in the course of their lives, and are therefore classified in the category *out-migration*.<sup>97</sup> Third, I examine the migration behaviour of married and unmarried individuals separately. Married individuals can be assumed to have migrated at least once: after marriage, to set up an

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<sup>95</sup> Greefs, H. & Winter, A. (forthcoming) "Alone and Far from Home. Gender and Migration Trajectories of Single Foreign Newcomers to Antwerp, 1850-1880" In: Schmidt, A., Devos I., De Groot J. (eds.) *The Lure of the City. Singles in Towns in the Low Countries, 1600-1900*. Special issue in *Journal of Urban History*.

<sup>96</sup> For a more detailed discussion of migration from a demographic perspective: Oris, M. (2003) "The History of Migration as a Chapter in the History of the European Rural Family: An Overview" *The History of the Family*, 8, 187-215.

<sup>97</sup> These individuals may also have migrated within the municipality to which they out-migrated- which would make them out-migrants and inside migrants. However, since we only know for certain that they left their hometown, they are classified in the category out-migration.



independent household. As such, living a sedentary life was rare for married individuals.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, we can assume that the circumstances in which married individuals migrated differed from those of singles. Fourth, in the analysis I exclude all individuals that migrated as a member of their parental household. If a person moved together with their parents, we can indeed assume that the migration arose solely from the migration of the parents (*parental migration*) and was less related to personal characteristics. This implies that a person who died in the house of their parents is considered to have led a sedentary life, regardless of whether they and their parents changed address during the person's life course. A person may have migrated as a member of another household as well - while living in the household of a sibling or relative, for example. However, as the vast majority of research individuals living in these types of households had reached adulthood by the time they lived there, we can assume that the migration, even though it was not a solitary migration, was partly influenced by the individual's characteristics and therefore worth taking into consideration. Finally, a deaf child living at a deaf school, which usually entailed the child residing in a different municipality for a large part of the school year, is not considered migration. This is consistent with the sources, which continued to register a deaf child in their parents' household during their education. Thus the deaf person continued to be domiciled in the house of their parents. Moreover, this type of temporary migration cannot really be considered the result of a conscious decision. The small number of deaf schools, initially confined to large cities, inevitably implied that many deaf children had to leave their hometown to receive an education. In the majority of the cases, however, the deaf youngsters returned to live in the house of their parents after graduation. For example, Eduardus De Cloedt, born deaf in Nevele in 1846, left his hometown of Nevele in 1857 to attend the school for deaf boys in Ghent. He resided in the institution until August 1875, after which he returned to live in the house of his parents. He continued to live in his parents' home after their death, together with his two unmarried sisters. After the marriage of one sister and the death of the other, he moved to the hospital in Vierboomstraat in Nevele in 1921, where he spent the last nine years of his life. In the analysis, Edouardus is considered to have migrated once within the municipality (inside migration), when he left the house of his parents to live in the hospital. However, if a person did not return to his parental home

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<sup>98</sup> It is possible that a person continued to live in the house of his or her parents after marriage, with a spouse who came to live in the parental house. In this case, a person can be considered *sedentary*. In the first birth cohort, it is impossible to ascertain whether a person continued to live in the parental house due to the absence of detailed residential information. In the second birth cohort, 2 percent of the married deaf and 4 percent of the married siblings resided in the parental house their whole lives - their spouses came to live in their houses after marriage. These rates indicate that living in the parental household after marriage was very uncommon. For this reason, I consider all married individuals in the first birth cohort migrants after marriage - except when it is otherwise specified in the sources.

and continued to live in the institution as an adult, the migration was considered as permanent and taken into account in the analysis. Augustinus De Schepper, for example, who was born deaf in Sint-Denijs-Westrem in 1836, spent his whole life in institutions of the Brothers of Charity. From the age of 10, Augustinus attended the school for deaf boys in Ghent. He remained in the institution until 1866, after which he moved to the recently opened mental institution situated in Palinghuizen in Ghent, where he died in 1896.<sup>99</sup> Augustinus is classified in the category inside migration and out-migration as he moved from Sint-Denijs-Westrem to Ghent, and within the city of Ghent.

### Types of migration

Table 6.6 presents the migration pattern of individuals born in the first birth cohort, according to civil status and gender. The figures indicate a clear distinction in the migration behaviour of married and unmarried individuals, as well as between deaf and hearing individuals. The majority of married deaf and hearing individuals migrated within the municipality, but a considerable group of married deaf men also left their hometown. The hearing singles usually led a sedentary life, while more deaf singles migrated, both within and outside the borders of their municipality.

**Table 6.6** Migration pattern according to gender and civil status, birth cohort 1, in %

	Married				Unmarried			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	D	S	D	S	D	S	D	S
N=	25	51	2	50	60	27	52	11
Sedentary	4	2	0	0	27	37	21	64
Inside migration	52	51	100	50	40	30	40	0
Out-migration	28	6	0	6	7	7	14	9
Inside migration and out- migration	4	12	0	16	3	0	6	0
Unknown	12	29	0	28	23	26	19	27
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Notes: D: Deaf and S: Siblings

The difference in the migration behaviour according to civil status coincides with the differences in household formation between the married and unmarried individuals. Almost all married men and women set up an independent household after marriage. As it was common practice for newlyweds to remain in their hometown, married persons

<sup>99</sup> The name of the street changes to 'Lindenstraat' in 1881, to 'Jozef Guislainstraat' in 1899.

were most often engaged in *inside migration*. The ones who moved outside the municipality usually did so because they married a spouse from another town and went to live in their spouse's hometown after marriage (*marriage migration*). In Chapter 5, I showed how deaf individuals were more frequently married to a spouse who was born in a different municipality. This may explain why deaf men were more often engaged in out-migration than hearing men (it is difficult to draw conclusions about the women because of the low number of deaf women marrying). Pierre Jean De Cremer, born deaf in Deftinge in 1786, for example, married a woman from the town of Idegem, about 6 kilometres away. As it was customary to marry in the town of residence of the bride, the marriage was inaugurated in Idegem. Pierre Jean probably moved to Idegem shortly after marriage as all of his eleven children were born in Idegem.

Most of the unmarried hearing individuals, especially the women, led a sedentary life. This implies that they died in the house of their parents, whether or not their parents were still alive. Deaf singles were more likely to leave their parents' house to live in a different house in their hometown or leave for another municipality. Parallel to our observation that more unmarried siblings died at a young age while they were still living in the house of their parents (6.2.3.2), it is not surprising that more single siblings did not migrate (independently of their parents). As such, the higher migration rates of the deaf singles (inside migration, out-migration or both) appear to be correlated to a higher age at death, and consequently more opportunities (and perhaps a greater necessity) to search for new housing. Most found new accommodation in their hometown, but about 15 percent of the deaf singles (compared to about 8 percent of the siblings) moved away. The wish to live together, preferably with relatives, in combination with the economic inability to support oneself probably motivated deaf singles to migrate within and outside their community.

**Table 6.7** Migration pattern according to gender and civil status, birth cohort 2, in %

	Married				Unmarried			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	D	S	D	S	D	S	D	S
N=	13	42	8	48	66	31	58	21
Sedentary	8	7	0	2	35	32	33	48
Inside migration	46	33	12	40	14	13	17	9
Out-migration	15	14	25	10	24	45	35	19
Out- & inside migration	23	43	63	40	18	7	12	5
Unknown	8	3	0	8	9	3	3	19
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Notes: D: Deaf and S: Siblings

In the second half of the nineteenth century, more deaf and hearing individuals migrated out of their place of birth (table 6.7). This increase is consistent with a general increase in Belgium of out-migration to expanding industrial cities and regions such as the Walloon provinces in the south of the country and northern France.<sup>100</sup> Most of the deaf married women (87 percent<sup>101</sup>) left their hometown, compared to 38 percent of the deaf men, 57 percent of the brothers and 50 percent of the sisters. In the majority of cases, the deaf and hearing spouses migrated after marriage: respectively 75 percent of each cohort migrated with their spouse, 17 percent as a widow(er). A minority of respectively 8 percent in each group migrated before marriage, in all cases temporarily, probably to work as a domestic servant (*life-cycle service*).

Compared to the first birth cohort more deaf singles led a sedentary life, comparable to the hearing siblings. However, a considerable number of individuals in the first birth cohort had an 'unknown' migration history, so it is difficult to validate this increase. On the other hand, following the trend in the married population, fewer singles moved exclusively within the borders of their hometown. On average, deaf and hearing singles left their hometown three to five times more often than the singles in the first birth cohort. While the incidence of out-migration was generally higher in the deaf cohort in the first birth cohort, we find no distinct pattern in the second cohort. Deaf single women out-migrated at almost twice the rate as their unmarried sisters, but the hearing single brothers out-migrated more than the deaf single men. An analysis of the destinations of these migrants, later on in this section, may elucidate the differences between the cohorts.

So far, I have determined that in the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century deaf individuals, both married and unmarried, were more likely to migrate compared to the hearing siblings. In the second half of the nineteenth century, however, differences became smaller as migration increased in both cohorts but most substantially in the hearing cohorts (especially among the brothers). In both cohorts, parallel to general trends, out-migration became increasingly important. Despite this growing conver-

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<sup>100</sup> Vanhaute, E., Karel, E. & Paping R. (2012) "The Low Countries 1750-2000" In: Vanhaute, E., Devos, I. & Lambrecht, T. (eds.) *Rural Economy and Society in North-Western Europe, 500-2000: Making a Living: Family, Income and Labour*. Turnhout: Brepols, 192; Neven, M. & Devos, I. (2001) "Breaking Stereotypes. Historical Demography in Belgium since 1981 (19th and early 20th Centuries)" *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, 31/3-4, 315.

<sup>101</sup> In the analysis of marriage endogamy (5.3.1.3) I showed that 30 percent of the deaf married women migrated to their place of marriage, compared to a mere 9 percent in the female sibling cohort. I related this difference to the higher migration rates among deaf women, which in turn increased their opportunities for meeting and marrying a husband from outside their hometown. The fact that many deaf women left their hometown to be educated in the city of Ghent seems of crucial importance here as all the deaf women married in the city of Ghent had a husband born in Ghent.

gence, disparities might pop-up in the frequency, duration, direction and distance of migration. A higher number of moves could point to greater uncertainty and economic insecurity, but it may also reflect a more flexible and enterprising attitude. Similarly, the distance over which a person or family travelled can reveal insights into the risks they were willing to take to try to improve their living conditions. Depending on a person's reasons for migrating, they could choose to move to the countryside, the city or even abroad.

### **Migration frequency**

Counting the number of times a person moved is not easily done. In the period before population registers became available, researchers are inevitably faced with an under-registration of moves between and within municipalities. A person's residence was only recorded when there was an event (birth, marriage, death), so their residential trajectory is full of gaps. In the analysis, I have deemed it reasonable to assume that if the same street name was recorded in the subsequent sources for a person, for example in the birth certificates of their children, then the person did not change address in the meantime. However, if the gap between two records was too large to be certain that a person did not move in between the records, the person was not included in the analysis. This was the case for Jean Baptiste Van Damme, who was born deaf in Kalken in 1786. He lived in Rosstraat in Kalken, according to the birth certificate of his one and only child in 1826. When he died in 1846, he was living in the house of Joannes Van Damme, his employer, in Molenstraat. Jean Baptiste probably moved after the death of his spouse in 1836 (no address was mentioned in her death certificate). Based on the sources, I know that Jean Baptist moved at least once, most likely twice: to Rosstraat after marriage and to Molenstraat sometime between the death of his spouse and his own death. The large gap in between the birth certificate of his daughter and his own death certificate, however, makes the number of moves impossible to assess accurately. For this reason, Jean Baptiste is not included in the analysis.

It was easier to count the number of times people moved for the second birth cohort, except when migration extended beyond the provincial borders of East Flanders or the population registers were incomplete. For example, Hendrik Van Den Bussche, born in 1864, lived in his parents' house in Aalter until 1896, after which he moved to the town of Wingene in the province of West Flanders. In 1899 he returned to his parents' house, but moved to Seraing in the province of Liège a year later. He married in Seraing in 1901 and became a father in 1902. In March 1904 he returned to Aalter and lived at the same address until his death in 1943. Based on the sources, Hendrik appears to have moved four times: from his parents' house to Wingene, from Wingene back to his parents' house, from his parents' house to Seraing and from Seraing to his own house in Aalter. However, Hendrik may have moved multiple times within the municipalities of Wingene and Seraing, making it difficult to make reliable statements about his migration

frequency. The same holds for individuals whose life course reconstruction is incomplete. Whereas individuals migrating out of the region could be included in the analysis of the types of migration (tables 6.6 and 6.7), their number of moves is unknown – after the end of observation individuals could have moved multiple times. If the individuals with an indefinite migration history are excluded, I am left with a group of 189 deaf and 175 hearing individuals.

On average, married deaf men and women moved 4.6 times during their lives (median 2 times), compared to 3.6 times (median 2 times) in the married sibling cohort.<sup>102</sup> Roughly stated, about two-thirds of the married individuals, both deaf and hearing, moved three times or less. This is consistent with the household formation cycle I identified for the married population. Generally a person migrated for the first time when they left the parental house to set up a new household, usually within the same municipality or otherwise in the village of residence of their spouse.<sup>103</sup> The majority of spouses continued to live in the same house until death, or until becoming a widow(er). In old age, individuals could move a second time to live in the household of a son or daughter, or a relative or to enter an institution.

**Table 6.8** Frequency of migration, married individuals according to birth cohort, in %

N=	Birth cohort 1		Birth cohort 2	
	Deaf 19	Siblings 52	Deaf 15	Siblings 56
0	0	4	7	7
1	53	48	13	14
2	16	15	13	21
3	21	17	0	13
4	0	8	7	13
5+	10	8	60	32
%	100	100	100	100

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

However, grouping the frequency of migration according to birth and research cohort reveals a more nuanced picture (table 6.8). It suggests that the situation in which married people migrated once or twice in life (after marriage and in old age) was characteristic for the first birth cohort only. About half the married individuals in the first birth

<sup>102</sup> These means and medians do not take into account migration as a member of the parental household.

<sup>103</sup> Some individuals migrated before marriage to live and work as a domestic servant in the household of an employer.

cohort migrated once during their lives and moving multiple times was quite rare. However, it is possible that the migration frequency in the first birth cohort was higher, but remains hidden due to the lack of continuous migration data. The table shows no distinct differences between the married deaf and sibling population.

In the second birth cohort, not only did more people move (table 6.7), but as table 6.8 shows they also moved more frequently. The number of married people who moved five times or more in the second cohort was six times higher for the deaf and quadrupled for siblings in the second cohort, and only a minority of the married population migrated just once. Deaf individuals (and their families<sup>104</sup>) in particular migrated over five times, nearly twice as much as the hearing individuals. Among the deaf individuals, the absolute record-holder is Joseph Louis Schiets, a tailor born in Ghent in 1846, who moved at least 32 times during his life – all within the city of Ghent. At the age of 26 Joseph Louis left the house of his mother, who was separated from her husband, and set up a solitary household. This in itself was exceptional for a deaf person. Until he married in 1875, Joseph Louis moved twice, both times living on his own. Once married, he moved to 15 different addresses together with his wife Julie and son. According to the population register of 1891, Joseph Louis applied for a visa to go to Rijsel on September 30, 1891 and for Paris on May 23, 1892 but in neither case did he actually move abroad. In 1894 his son left home and Joseph Louis and his wife moved soon afterwards. Joseph Louis moved two more times with his wife, after which he settled down in Plotersgracht, “separated” from his wife. Until his death in 1918, Joseph Louis moved 14 more times, sometimes accompanied by his wife, sometimes living by himself (“temporarily separated” from his spouse). The large number of different residences, all in Ghent, suggests that Joseph Louis and his spouse may have had difficulties in paying their rent and were therefore forced to move many times. They even moved to a different house in the same street, so it seems unlikely that there were other motives, such as better surroundings, behind their migration behaviour. Thus the higher migration frequency of the deaf married couples may be a reflection of greater economic insecurity, but other factors may explain the higher frequency as well. The example of Joseph Louis suggests that migration may have been influenced by a person’s occupation. Each time a migration was registered in the population registers Joseph Louis was recorded as a tailor and his wife as a day labourer. Both were thus engaged in an occupation that did not necessarily imply the possession of land – in contrast to a farming couple for example – or commitment to a specific location – like an innkeeper or shopkeeper. So they were probably less bound to a specific house and able to move more freely. In this regard, the shift from agricul-

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<sup>104</sup> Previously I showed that the vast majority of migrations by married individuals took place when they were married, and were thus accompanied by their spouse and often children.

ture to unskilled labour and crafts in the course of the nineteenth century may explain why more individuals in the second birth cohort were able, or perhaps required, to migrate more.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, the higher representation of the hearing siblings in agriculture and trade (see Chapter 4) may account for their lower migration frequencies.

To test this assumption, I related the number of migrations (between 0 and 3 and more than 3 moves) to the occupation of the male spouse (table 6.9). The male spouse could either be the deaf or hearing research individual himself (in the case of men) or the husband of the female research individuals. It can be assumed that the occupation of the male household head was a more decisive factor for migration. For example, many women in the first birth cohort were registered as spinners involved in the domestic cottage industry. However, their husbands usually worked as farmers. While women could exercise spinning activities at any place with a spinning wheel, farm work implies that a family was connected to a certain plot of land. Table 6.9 shows 3 numbers for each category. Each occupation group in the total married population is indicated in the first column as a percentage. To partly overcome the problem of small population sizes, I distinguished between just five types of occupations that I believe may have affected a person's migration opportunities: occupations in agriculture, trade and the food industry (such as brewer, baker and butcher) are considered occupations that are bound to a certain location, while occupations such as unskilled labourer or in crafts (such as textile worker, clothing manufacturing, or wood and construction) allow a person to migrate more easily. Other occupations, within transport and administration, are classified in the category 'other'. I took into account one occupation for each person, more specifically the occupation that is most frequently registered in the sources after the event of marriage (since migration generally occurred after marriage, the occupations after marriage are most relevant). For example, Engelbertus Rijkaert was registered ten times as a farmer and three times as a worker. It can therefore be assumed that Engelbertus had a farm, but sometimes supplemented his income by working as an unskilled labourer. Thus Engelbertus is considered to work in agriculture in the analysis. The second and third column present the percentages of couples within each occupational group that migrated less (0-3) or more than three times (+3). The sum of both columns is thus always a 100 percent (row percentages). For example, 100 percent of the deaf couples in which the husband was a farmer migrated between 0 and 3 times. None of the couples migrated more than three times.

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<sup>105</sup> The relationship between migration and occupation was studied by among others: Vandenbroeke, C. (1981) "De keurlingenlijsten als sociaal-demografische meter" *De Leiegouw*, 23, 235-73.



**Table 6.9** Migration behaviour according to occupation of the male spouse and birth cohort, in %

	Birth cohort 1						Birth cohort 2					
	Deaf (N=16)			Siblings (N=68)			Deaf (N=17)			Siblings (N=71)		
	%	0-3	+3	%	0-3	+3	%	0-3	+3	%	0-3	+3
Agriculture	31	100	0	34	91	9	6	100	0	16	77	23
Trade	0	0	0	3	100	0	0	0	0	4	67	33
Crafts-Food	6	100	0	1	0	100	0	0	0	6	80	20
Unskilled labour	19	67	33	22	60	40	12	50	50	31	60	40
Crafts	44	86	14	34	70	30	82	36	64	33	37	63
Other	0	0	0	6	25	75	0	0	0	10	50	50
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>			<i>100</i>			<i>100</i>			<i>100</i>		

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Table 6.9 confirms that the migration frequency was indeed highest among unskilled workers and craftsmen (not working in the food industry). In the first birth cohort, the proportion of male spouses working in these mobile occupations was rather similar in both research cohorts, which might account for the limited differences in migration frequency in the first cohort. In the second birth cohort, 94 percent of the male spouses in the deaf marriages were employed in unskilled labour or crafts, compared to 64 percent in the sibling marriages. The higher representation of deaf spouses in more mobile occupations may have contributed to their higher migration frequency rates. The distribution in the more ‘immobile’ occupation types, such as agriculture, trade and the food sector, suggests that people working in these sectors generally migrated less frequently. However, as the second sibling cohort indicates, migration was not impracticable. An additional explanation for the higher migration frequency of the married deaf may lie in the smaller family size of the deaf couples. In the previous chapter, I showed how more deaf couples remained childless or had fewer children. We can assume that having a large family was more challenging for migration than having only a few children. Similarly, Manfredini explained the high migration rates of nineteenth-century farm daylabourers in Casalguidi (Italy) by their small household size.<sup>106</sup> The sibling cohort families that migrated more than three times did indeed have fewer children than those migrating less frequently: on average, 4.9 children compared to 6.2 children in the families migrating less than three times. However, in the deaf cohort both categories had a similar number of children (on average, 4.8 and 4.6 children). The lower average number of children in the deaf cohort, comparable to the family size of the more mobile

<sup>106</sup> Manfredini, M. (2003) “Families in Motion: the Role and Characteristics of Household Migration in a 19th-Century Rural Italian Parish” *The History of the Family*, 8/2, 317-43.

sibling families, may have made migration more feasible for the majority of married deaf.

I now turn to the migration frequencies of the singles. Contrary to what we might expect, but in line with previous findings (tables 6.6 and 6.7), the frequency of migration was lower among the unmarried individuals.<sup>107</sup> On average, deaf singles migrated 1.3 times (median 1 time) and single siblings 1.6 times (median 0 times). The distribution according to the number of moves is shown in table 6.10.

The majority of the singles in both birth cohorts led a sedentary life, meaning they died in the house of their parents. We know that most hearing singles died in the house of their parents when their parents were still alive (see 6.2.3.2). In the deaf cohorts, more singles outlived their parents but continued to live in the house of their parents together with other unmarried siblings. Those singles that did move once or twice usually left their parents' house to live in the house of a married sibling or in the case of the deaf, to live in an institution. The increasing number of institutionalized deaf men and women may help to account for the slight increase in the migration frequency in birth cohort 2.

**Table 6.10** Frequency of migration, singles according to birth cohort, in %

N=	Birth cohort 1		Birth cohort 2	
	Deaf	Siblings	Deaf	Siblings
	50	22	105	45
0	54	77	40	44
1	16	9	30	27
2	20	14	14	11
3	6	0	9	9
4	0	0	4	0
+5	4	0	3	9
%	100	100	100	100

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

To sum up, married deaf individuals moved more frequently than the married siblings – especially in the second cohort – which might be a reflection of their higher economic insecurity, their higher representation within more ‘mobile’ occupations and their on

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<sup>107</sup> Previous research has indicated that singles, especially adolescents, moved more frequently than families. E.g. Dribe, M. (2003) “Migration of Rural Families in 19th Century Southern Sweden. A Longitudinal Analysis of Local Migration Patterns” *The History of the Family*, 8/2, 247-65. However, many of these migrating singles still married later on in life. Therefore it is difficult, based on previous studies, to make statements about the differences in migration frequency between ever-married individuals and never-married persons.

average smaller family size. Differences between the deaf and hearing singles were more limited, but unmarried deaf individuals moved slightly more frequent. This might be related to their generally higher age at death and their higher institutionalization rates.

### Duration of migration

An important distinction in migration behaviour is between temporary migration and permanent relocation. Temporary migration means a person returns home after a period away. This period can vary from a couple of weeks to months or even years. Seasonal migration is a specific type of temporary migration and implies a person leaves home for one season. For example, farm workers were usually hired seasonally and moved back home after the harvest.<sup>108</sup> Another important group of temporary migrants were urban and rural domestic servants. Young men and women went to serve and live in the house of their employer, usually until marriage. Many servants returned to their hometown at the end of their service.<sup>109</sup> In historical populations temporary migration is the most difficult to detect. In the period before 1846 people may have moved temporarily in between life events, but since there were no population registers they left no traces of migration. Moreover, individuals often did not report short-term moves, so there is frequently an under-registration of short-term migration and the person is still recorded as domiciled in their hometown. Permanent relocation, on the other hand, implies that a person left their hometown to settle down in another municipality. Permanent migration is more easily discernable in the sources, although the destination of the definitive move is often unknown if it happened in the period before population registers became available.

Table 6.11 presents the percentages of permanent and temporary out-migration according to birth cohort and civil status for the deaf and hearing research population. The 'N' in the table refers to the number of moves and not to the number of unique migrants. A person could indeed move temporarily and/or permanently several times. For example, the deaf Marie Therese Verpoort moved permanently from Zulzeke to Ghent in September 1862 to reside in the *Hospice des Incurables* run by the Sisters of Charity. In 1908 there was a second permanent out-migration to the mental institution for women in the neighbouring municipality of Melle, where she died in 1916. Marie Therese is counted

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<sup>108</sup> Fuchs, R.G. (2005) *Gender and Poverty in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 103.

<sup>109</sup> An elaborate discussion on the migration of domestic servants can be found in: Matthys, C. (2011) *Sex and the City. Servants and the Diffusion of Fertility Control in Flanders, 1830-1930*; Lambrecht, T. (2001) "Slave to the wage? Het dienstpersoneel op het platteland in Vlaanderen (16de-18de eeuw)" *Oost-Vlaamse Zanten. Tijdschrift voor Volkscultuur in Vlaanderen*, 76/1, 32-48.

twice in the analysis (in the column of the unmarried deaf of birth cohort 2). All migrants that moved from their place of origin to a new municipality but eventually returned are considered temporary migrants, regardless of the duration of their stay in the new municipality. Romanie Langenhove, for example, lived in the city of Ghent for 41 years, before returning to her hometown of Boekhoute.

**Table 6.11** Permanent and temporary out-migration according to birth cohort and civil status, in %

	Birth cohort 1				Birth cohort 2			
	Deaf (N=29)		Siblings (N=22)		Deaf (N=93)		Siblings (N=130)	
	M	UM	M	UM	M	UM	M	UM
Permanent	67	78	80	100	42	68	53	55
Temporary	33	22	20	0	58	32	47	45
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Notes: M: married, UM: unmarried

In both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most deaf and hearing individuals left their hometown to live permanently in another municipality: in all categories, except for the second married deaf cohort, most migrations had a permanent character. However, in the course of the nineteenth century there was a major increase in temporary out-migration across all the cohorts, so the percentage difference between permanent and temporary migration declined. This observation is consistent with the general rise in temporary and seasonal migration in the nineteenth century, which ran parallel with the processes of urbanization, improvements in the transportation infrastructure and the increasing importance of life-cycle service.<sup>110</sup> Married individuals were more likely to migrate temporarily than unmarried individuals, who were more often engaged in permanent out-migration.<sup>111</sup> Perhaps this is an indication that married individuals were more tied to their hometown, while singles were less attached to their place of origin and had fewer difficulties with moving away permanently.

<sup>110</sup> Moch, L. P. (1995) "Moving Europeans: Historical Migration Practices in Western Europe", 127.

<sup>111</sup> C. Sarasua agrees that married migrants were more likely to migrate only temporary, while for single migrants temporary migrations often meant a first step towards permanent migration, as a result of among other things, marriage. Sarasua, C. (2001) "Leaving Home to Help the Family? Male and Female Temporary Migrants in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Spain" In: Sharpe, P. (ed.) *Women, Gender and Labour Migration. Historical and Global Perspectives*. London/New York: Routledge, 31.

### *Temporary migration*

The correlation of the timing of temporary out-migration with civil status shows that fewer deaf individuals moved temporarily before marriage compared to their siblings.<sup>112</sup> Only three deaf individuals migrated before marriage. Marie Therese Verwee moved from Ghent to Asper in 1868, after graduating from the deaf school, to live and work as a tailor in the house of the “great tailor” (according to the entry list of the *Institut des Sourdes-Muettes*). Three months after her return to Ghent in 1875, she married the deaf Edmond Francois Bresous in Ghent. Jean Francois Bauwens’ move from Ghent to Paris in 1865 at the age of 30 was probably also motivated by occupational considerations, as he moved on his own and presumably had no relatives in Paris at the time. Four months after his departure, he returned to Ghent. The above-mentioned Romanie Langenhove, on the other hand, moved from Boekhoute to Ghent in July 1890 after the death of her parents to live in the house of maternal relatives. Family support, rather than employment opportunities, seems to have been the reason for Romanie’s migration. In Ghent she met her husband and married in February 1919. Romanie remained in Ghent until 1931, after which she returned to her hometown of Boekhoute.

Among the hearing siblings, it was more common to move temporarily and over larger distances before marriage. Unmarried women usually migrated to a nearby city to work as a servant, while the unmarried men moved more often outside the province of East Flanders. Based on their occupations, such as weavers or unskilled labourers, it seems likely that they were attracted by the employment opportunities in larger cities – Brussels, Antwerp and cities in the Walloon area were popular destinations. After a couple of years, they returned home and married soon afterwards. The difference in the timing of temporary migration between deaf and hearing individuals suggest that it may have been more difficult for deaf men and women to move before marriage, as youngsters usually migrated unaccompanied.<sup>113</sup> Once married, however, temporary migrations were more common among the deaf as 15 percent of all married deaf men and women out-migrated temporarily during their marriage, compared to only 8 percent of the hearing siblings.<sup>114</sup> It is unclear why the deaf couples engaged in temporary migrations, but they all moved within close proximity to their hometown and for a short period, suggesting that their move did not constitute a life-changing event.

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<sup>112</sup> 71 percent of the deaf were married at the time of short-term migration; 21 percent migrated before marriage, 7 percent after the death of his or her spouse; 61 percent of the siblings were married at time of short-term migration; 30 percent migrated before marriage, 9 percent after the death of his or her spouse.

<sup>113</sup> Youngsters could of course also move together with their parents, but as I made clear in the introduction parental migration is not taken into account.

<sup>114</sup> 7 of the 48 married deaf individuals migrated temporarily during marriage (3 individuals migrated twice); 16 of the 191 married siblings moved temporarily during marriage (8 individuals moved more than once).

As stated above, temporary migration was less common for single deaf and hearing men and women. Of all the singles, only about 12 percent of the deaf and 8 percent of the hearing individuals moved temporarily outside their hometown.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, the single temporary migrants did not exhibit a clear profile. Both men and women moved temporarily, with ages ranging from 19 to 73. They moved to both neighbouring towns and outside East Flanders and even across national borders. Some of them moved and returned within a month, while others only returned after more than 30 years. Two examples illustrate the diversity of the group of deaf single temporary migrants. Sophie Gyselinck, born deaf in Schorisse in 1849, had moved permanently from Schorisse to Ghent in 1874 to go and live in the convent of the Sisters of Charity, with whom she probably became acquainted during her education in the period 1863-1870. In 1891 she moved within the city of Ghent to the female mental asylum. When this institution was moved in 1908 to the neighbouring town of Melle, Sophie moved with it. However, after only two months she returned to the city of Ghent, where she spent the last ten years of her life in the *Hospice des Incurables*. As Sophie moved together with other patients in the asylum, her move to Melle had probably little to do with personal choice and was probably not intended to be temporary. Her return to Ghent to live in another institution, however, suggests that she may not have settled in the institution in Melle, and preferred to return to Ghent.

Sometime around 1827, the 18-year-old Jacques Francois Van Haerde decided to leave his hometown of Ghent for Brussels. In 1843, he returned to Ghent and shared a house with his unmarried sister. In 1847 he moved back to Brussels, but returned within the same year. From his return onwards Jacques Francois lived in Ghent on his own, together with unrelated co-residents until 1876, when he was institutionalized. He died in an institution of the Brothers of Love in 1887. The incentive for Jacques Francois to move twice to Brussels is unclear. Perhaps he was attracted by the great demand for domestic servants in Brussels, or perhaps he wanted to learn a craft – Jacques Francois was registered as a guildier in the population registers of Ghent in 1843, 1847 and 1866. The most plausible motive for Jacques' move seem to be economic considerations, as he did not have close relatives in Brussels, nor is it likely that he resided in an institution there as he lived on his own after his return. Several other deaf single migrants also moved for the same reason and mainly found work as a domestic servant. The profile of the hearing single migrants shows a similar variation, but in contrast to the deaf singles institutionalization was not an incentive for temporary migration.

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<sup>115</sup> These percentages are calculated based on the total number of deaf and hearing singles (N= 236 and N=156). The percentages in table 6.11 are different as they are calculated based on the total number of outmigrations of deaf and hearing singles (N=112 and N=152).

### *Permanent migration*

The majority of the deaf and hearing individuals who out-migrated, however, left their hometown permanently. In the case of the married individuals, permanent out-migration usually occurred after marriage, most often shortly after marriage. 73 percent of the permanently out-migrating individuals migrated during marriage, compared to 14 percent before marriage and 13 percent during widowhood. Differences between the married deaf and siblings are limited.<sup>116</sup> In a considerable number of cases, migration was the direct result of marriage, as people moved to the hometown of their spouses. There are, however, also sufficient examples in which deaf and hearing couples moved to a municipality unfamiliar to both of them. The deaf man Joseph Wesemael, for example, married Maria Theresia Deck in 1816 in her hometown of Berlare, about 9 kilometres away from his hometown of Lebbeke. Shortly after marriage, they moved to Overmere, where their first child was born in January 1817. Overmere was situated about 5 kilometres from Maria Theresia's hometown and 14 kilometres from Lebbeke. There is no clear indication of the circumstances that made the couple decide to move to Overmere, but perhaps they moved because Joseph had the opportunity to run an inn there – he was registered as an innkeeper in the birth certificate of his first child. Perhaps occupational considerations spurred the couple to relocate again the following year, as their second child was born in 1818 in yet another municipality, Oudegem, situated about 9 kilometres from Overmere. In the birth certificate of his daughter Virginie, Joseph was recorded as a teacher – perhaps at the municipal school. However, shortly afterwards the family returned to Joseph's hometown of Lebbeke, where three more children were born. Around 1825 they moved again, this time to Wieze – about 4 kilometres away. Perhaps employment opportunities for weavers were better in Wieze, as Joseph worked as a factory weaver until his retirement around 1870.

The incentives for widow(er)s to move seem to have been less job-driven, but rather related to the need for support. The deaf woman Nathalie De Rijcke moved from her place of residence in Huise to the city of Ghent in 1912 three months after the death of her husband Augustus, to whom she had been married for 47 years. In Ghent, she went to live in the household of her married daughter Elodie. In 1917 she moved within Ghent to reside in the household of her other daughter Marie Camilla, who had become a widow shortly before. Nathalie continued to live in the household of her daughter until her death in 1924. This example shows that co-residence with family could be an important motive for permanent migration, especially in old age. The fact that no occupations

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<sup>116</sup> As the number of married deaf individuals is low (N=48), and we only take into account those migrating permanently out of the community, the number of migrants shrinks to 3 individuals. Based on 3 individuals, we cannot draw reliable conclusions.

were recorded for Nathalie in the population registers confirms that she did not move to Ghent out of occupational considerations – which is not to deny that Nathalie also moved out of economic necessity.

The biggest difference between permanent and temporary migration occurs in the cohort of out-migrating deaf and hearing singles, with permanent migration being the most popular. 61 deaf singles (25 percent) and 19 unmarried siblings (20 percent) left their place of origin permanently during their adult life. As in the case of the temporary single migrants, the permanent migrants exhibited no univocal characteristics. Charles Francois Devriendt was seven when in 1842 he left his parental home in Drongen to attend the school for deaf boys in Ghent. He never returned home and died in the asylum of the Brothers of Charity in 1895. Joannes Franciscus De Brabander, on the other hand, lived in his place of birth Drongen until he was 83, after which he moved to the convent of Lovendegem 6 kilometres away, where he died. About 42 percent of the permanent migrations of the deaf singles were to a city – 50 percent if the migrations with an unknown destination are excluded – with 82 percent heading to the city of Ghent. The deaf men and women moving to Ghent had usually attended the deaf school there and then remained in the city after graduation, usually in another institution. The unmarried siblings too, both men and women, moved at different ages (17 to 78) to a wide range of destinations. Contrary to the deaf singles, however, they provide less evidence of a strong pull towards a particular city or region. The absence of specific institutions geared to their needs may explain this difference.

Thus, in both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most deaf and hearing individuals left their hometown to live permanently in another municipality. However, in the course of the nineteenth century temporary out-migration increased, declining the percentage difference between permanent and temporary migration. Both married deaf and hearing individuals migrated more often temporarily than singles, but differences did come forward in the timing of temporary migration: fewer deaf individuals migrated temporary before marriage compared to the siblings, indicating that it may have been more difficult for deaf men and women to move unaccompanied. In both married deaf and hearing cohorts, permanent out-migration usually occurred after marriage. Most of the deaf and hearing singles engaged in permanent migration and temporary migration was less common. The single temporary and permanent migrants did not exhibit a clear profile, but the incentives for hearing singles to migrate seem to have been less directed towards institutionalization than for the deaf singles.

### **Direction of migration**

The preference of the deaf singles for moving to Ghent leads us to the analysis of the direction of migration. With direction, I refer to movements to and from rural and ur-



ban regions, as well as from within the province of East Flanders to another Belgian province or even outside the national borders. I distinguish between six categories of direction in the analysis. Individuals could move: 1) from a rural to a rural municipality, 2) between cities, 3) from the countryside to the city, 4) from the city to the countryside, 5) outside the province, and 6) outside the country. Thus only the individuals engaged in out-migration are taken into account. In the analysis, the 'N' refers to the number of migrations and not to the number of migrants. Indeed, a person could move several times and in several directions. The place of birth (or the initial place of residence) is considered the starting point. For example, Marie Nathalie Raspoet, born deaf in Denderleeuw in 1859, moved from Denderleeuw to Schaarbeek in March 1900 together with the family of her married sister. In December of the same year, they returned to Denderleeuw. In July 1913, while still living together with her married sister, the family moved from Denderleeuw to Aalst, to return in March 1915. In 1918 the whole household, including Marie Nathalie, moved permanently to Aalst. Marie Nathalie is counted three times in the analysis: once when she moved temporarily from Denderleeuw to Schaarbeek (rural-urban), once when she moved temporarily from Denderleeuw to Aalst (rural-urban) and once when she moved permanently from Denderleeuw to Aalst (rural-urban). The analysis does not distinguish between temporary and permanent migration, but in the case of temporary migration the return migration is not taken into account. In the example of Marie Nathalie, this means that her return moves from Schaarbeek to Denderleeuw and from Aalst to Denderleeuw are not counted.

Table 6.12 classifies the migrations into the six categories of direction, according to birth cohort and civil status for both research groups. Migrations in an unknown direction are indicated in the last row, but are not considered in the discussion below.<sup>117</sup>

Table 6.12 shows that in the first birth cohort migration predominantly took place between rural municipalities, especially among the married individuals. Respectively 83 and 40 percent of the married deaf and hearing persons moved between rural villages, compared to 27 percent of the deaf singles. For the deaf singles it was more common to move from the countryside to the city, and even outside the province. However, the low number of cases makes it difficult to make conclusive statements – all the more since out-migration was generally rare among singles in the first birth cohort (table 6.6). All four deaf singles moving from the countryside to the city were women, of which three moved to Ghent to be institutionalized. A distinction according to permanent and temporary migration shows that most of the out-migrants in the first birth cohort who

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<sup>117</sup> This explains why there are unmarried siblings in the first birth cohort in table 5.9 but not in table 5.10: There are two unmarried siblings in the first birth cohort who permanently left their hometown, but moved to an unknown place.

moved within the countryside or from the countryside to the city moved permanently, while those moving from the city to the countryside or outside East Flanders usually migrated temporarily and returned to their hometown.

**Table 6.12** Direction of out-migration according to birth cohort and civil status, in %

	Birth cohort 1				Birth cohort 2			
	Deaf (N=31)		Siblings (N=23)		Deaf (N=95)		Siblings (N=128)	
	M	UM	M	UM	M	UM	M	UM
Rural - Rural	83	27	40	0	11	10	27	29
Urban-Urban	0	5	0	0	0	4	7	5
Rural - Urban	17	21	5	0	16	41	9	21
Urban - Rural	0	5	15	0	37	21	13	11
Outside East Flanders	0	16	15	0	5	16	28	21
Outside Belgium	0	0	0	0	21	1	12	8
Unknown	0	26	25	100	10	7	4	5
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Notes: M: married, UM: unmarried

The second birth cohort shows a much more varied pattern of migration directions. Generally we find that migration between rural towns became less common, in favour of increased migration from the countryside to the city and outside the borders of East Flanders and even Belgium itself. Until the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Flanders was characterized by ruralization, as up to 90 percent of the population lived in the countryside. This rural prosperity was the outcome of the work opportunities offered by the dominant rural linen industry. However, in the course of the nineteenth century, parallel to the decline in the cottage industry and the 1846 agricultural crisis, more and more people left the countryside for the city. Within the region, large and medium-sized cities, such as Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent, Kortrijk and Mechelen, were important destinations. The most important pull factor of these cities came from the employment opportunities they offered in the expanding industrial and port sectors.<sup>118</sup> Compared to the first birth cohort, more married and unmarried individuals in-

<sup>118</sup> Matthys, C. (2013) "Dossier: migratie tussen stad en platteland in Vlaanderen tijdens de 19de eeuw" <[www.familiegeschiedenis.be](http://www.familiegeschiedenis.be)>, consulted on 07/07/2014; Greefs, H. & Blondé, B. (2005) "The Growth of Urban Industrial Regions"; Stengers, J. (1982) "Les mouvements migratoires en Belgique aux 19e et 20e siècles" *Cahiers de Cléo*, 7-17; Pasleau, S. (1994) "Les migrations internes en Belgique. Ruptures et continuités du 18e au 20e siècle" In: Commission Internationale de Démographie Historique (ed.) *Internal and Medium-Distance Migrations in Europe, 1500-1900*. Santiago de Compostela: Xunta de Galicia, 179-203; Eggerickx, T. (2010) "Les migrations internes en Wallonie et en Belgique de 1840 à 1939: un essai de synthèse" In: Eggerickx, T. & Sanderson, J.P.

deed moved from the countryside to the city. The number of destinations was rather limited: 78 percent of the deaf rural-urban migrations were to the city of Ghent, almost always permanently. Institutionalization appears to have been the main incentive for deaf singles to move to Ghent as almost all the deaf moving to Ghent were institutionalized after their move. Three married deaf women moved from the countryside to Ghent: Nathalie De Rijcke, who went to live with her daughter in old age, and Marie Therese Verwee and Romanie Langenhove, who probably met their husbands in Ghent during their education and married and remained in Ghent after graduation. Of the hearing rural-urban migrants, 67 percent moved to Ghent as well, almost always permanently as well. More economic incentives seem to have driven the siblings to Ghent as the occupations they (or their spouses) exercised were more characteristic of city life. For example, Florentinus De Schepper and Melanie De Meyer moved from respectively Sint-Denijs-Westrem and Meilegem to Ghent to work in the domestic service sector. Florentinus remained unmarried and worked as a servant his whole life. Melanie found her spouse while serving in Ghent and continued to live there after her marriage.

Against the background of an increasing urbanization, it is surprising that a large percentage of deaf married couples moved from the city to the countryside (37 percent). However, a closer look at this group shows that 60 percent of the urban-rural migrations were only temporary and individuals later returned to the city. Almost all the migrations to rural areas took place between the city of Ghent and its suburbs – thus over a short distance.

A considerable number of people moved outside the borders of East Flanders and even Belgium. A comparison according to civil status and research group shows that married individuals and hearing siblings were more likely to leave the province compared to singles and deaf persons: respectively 26 percent of the married deaf and 17 percent of the single deaf left East Flanders, compared to 40 percent of the married siblings and 29 percent of the single siblings. With regard to civil status, I should note that 40 percent of the cross-regional migrations by the married individuals occurred before marriage, implying that the companionship of a partner cannot entirely explain the higher incidence of this type of migration among the married individuals. Of those migrating outside East Flanders before marriage, 64 percent did return to their place of origin after a short period of time. Once married, more individuals left East Flanders permanently (80 percent). Among the singles about 55 percent moved permanently outside East Flanders. The permanent migration could be preceded by temporary migrations. For example, the

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(eds.) *Histoire de la population de la Belgique et de ses territoires*. Louvain-la-Neuve: Presses universitaires de Louvain, 293-336.

deaf man Jean Francois Bauwens, mentioned above, first spent 16 months in Paris, came back to Ghent in 1867, but migrated permanently to Paris in 1871.

The higher outmigration of (married and single) siblings compared to (married and single) deaf persons suggests that deafness may have been an important obstacle for people to undertake long-distance migrations. There may also have been fewer incentives for deaf persons to move outside of the province. Nearby cities within the province could supply in institutional needs and garment artisans, who were well-represented in the deaf population, were generally less inclined to migrate for economical reasons – unlike unskilled labourers.<sup>119</sup> As more siblings were unskilled labourers, they may have been more engaged in migration out of the province and country in a search for better employment.

The Flemish cities of Antwerp and Brussels were important destinations outside the province. However, many migrants moved beyond Flanders and went to the Walloon provinces or even abroad, most often to France. From about 1845, thousands of Flemings moved to the Walloon provinces, which were more prosperous until 1965. The attraction poles were the mines and steel mills around Liège, to a lesser extent around Charleroi, and the large farms in Hainaut, Namur and Luxembourg. Similarly, farmers and unskilled workers went to France to work in the mining industry around Lens or in the textile industry around Lille and Roubaix. That migration took place on an enormous scale becomes clear from the presence of Flemish districts abroad, such as ‘petit Audenaerde’ in Wattrelos near Roubaix, a city that grew in the nineteenth century from 8,000 to 120,000 inhabitants, half of whom were Belgians. Moreover, in 1900 there were nearly 30,000 Belgians in Paris, working mainly as domestic servants for wealthy Parisians.<sup>120</sup> The research individuals follow this general trend as migration outside East Flanders mainly took place to the Walloon provinces and Roubaix and Paris in France.

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<sup>119</sup> Winter, A. (2009) *Migrants and Urban Change: Newcomers to Antwerp, 1760-1860*. London: Pickering and Chatto, 17. Similarly, M. Manfredini showed that nineteenth-century farm labourers in Casalguidi (Italy) had the highest migration rates compared to farmers, artisans and non-farmers. Manfredini, M. (2003) “Families in Motion”, 317-43. H. Greefs and A. Winter showed how from 1850-1880 the city of Antwerp mainly attracted migrants practising either highly skilled commercial occupations or unspecialized casual labour. Female migrants were mainly employed as domestic servants, employees in shops, hotels or inns or as teachers. Greefs, H. & Winter, A. (forthcoming) “Alone and Far from Home”.

<sup>120</sup> Goddeeris, I. & Hermans, R. (2011) *Vlaamse migranten in Wallonië, 1850-2000*. Leuven: Lannoo. A casestudy of Flemish migration to France can be found in: Verschooris, E. (2007) *Migratie van landbouwers uit het kanton Oosterzele (Oost-Vlaanderen) naar het kanton Ribécourt (Oise) tijdens het interbellum*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished master’s dissertation).

## Migration distance

However, it is difficult to assess the impact of out-migration without taking into account distance, the spacing between municipalities in kilometres. For example, Fernand De Jonghe was born deaf in Moerbeke in 1832 and died in the house of his employer situated in Deux-Acres in the province of Hainaut. Although Fernand engaged in migration outside the province of East Flanders, calculating the distance between the centres of Moerbeke and Deux-Acres shows that Fernand only travelled a distance of 5.5 kilometres. This observation is in line with previous research, which indicates that most migrants moved to a municipality in the immediate vicinity. In particular, permanent migration shows a strong distance–decay relationship, with the probability of moving declining sharply with increasing distance. This was less the case with temporary moves.<sup>121</sup> In the course of the nineteenth century, however, parallel with improvements in the transport infrastructure, more people moved over larger distances.

To determine the distances over which individuals moved, I made use of the Excel file developed by the LOKSTAT project. This file gives the distance in a straight line between any two residential nuclei for all municipalities in Belgium. So the distances should be considered a minimum as people on foot or using a vehicle did not usually travel in a straight line. Only unique distances are taken into account. This means that the distance between the same two municipalities is counted once, regardless of the number of times a person moved between these places. For example, Pierre Louis Theeuws, a deaf man born in Ghent in 1860, moved five times from Ghent to Ledeborg on a temporary basis. The distance between Ghent and Ledeborg is taken into account once in the calculation of the average distance.

Deaf individuals moved over an average distance of 23 kilometres (median 13 kilometres) compared to an average distance of 28 kilometres (median 8 kilometres) for the sibling cohort. The higher average distance in the sibling cohort can be explained by the larger number of siblings moving outside the borders of East Flanders. Looking at the median, however, we see that deaf individuals covered a slightly larger distance. This is also the case if I exclude migrations to outside the province. Within the province, deaf individuals moved an average distance of 13 kilometres (median 8 kilometres) compared to 12 kilometres (median 6 kilometres) for the sibling cohort. Differences between the deaf and hearing are all in all limited.

A more differentiated image becomes apparent when the distances are grouped according to civil status. A comparison of the distances covered by singles (both permanent singles and married individuals before marriage) and those of married individuals

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<sup>121</sup> Bell, M. & Ward, G. (2000) “Comparing Temporary Mobility with Permanent Migration”, 104.

shows that within the sibling cohort, singles travelled over larger distances than married individuals. Married siblings moved within a radius of about 22 kilometres, while singles relocated over a distance of 37 kilometres on average. In the deaf cohort, however, the opposite was the case: married individuals covered an average of 32 kilometres compared to 22 kilometres for the singles. Based on these average distances, it appears that deaf individuals moved to a farther municipality more easily when accompanied by a spouse. This is also indicated by the average distances of the migrations outside East Flanders: The distances travelled by married deaf individuals significantly exceeded the distances of the deaf singles.<sup>122</sup> In the sibling cohort, on the other hand, singles travelled substantially farther than married couples.<sup>123</sup>

### 6.2.4.3 Motives for migration

What is more difficult to grasp are the motives that drove individuals to move to a certain destination, either permanently or temporarily. As many environmental and personal circumstances influence a person's decision to move – and information about these factors is largely absent in the sources – it is difficult to make conclusive statements about the objectives of migration. Moreover, the uniqueness of each person's life trajectory prevents one from converting the motives into a quantitative structure.

Migration within and outside a municipality were presumably driven by different incentives. In contrast to out-migration, occupational considerations were probably less of an incentive for inside migration, except when a person came into possession of a piece of land, or started to run a business that required a certain location, such as an inn or shop.<sup>124</sup> Two important incentives for inside migration were marriage and the possibility (or necessity) of individuals living in the household of relatives or in a local institution. Previously, I discussed that it was common for newly-weds to set up an independ-

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<sup>122</sup> The married deaf moving outside East Flanders migrated on average over 51 kilometres, compared to 33 kilometres for the deaf singles. The married deaf moving outside Belgium migrated on average over 160 kilometres, compared to 72 kilometres for the deaf singles.

<sup>123</sup> The married siblings moving outside East Flanders migrated on average over 39 kilometres, compared to 44 kilometres for the deaf singles. The married deaf moving outside Belgium migrated on average over 87 kilometres, compared to 179 kilometres for the deaf singles.

<sup>124</sup> M. Dribe identified two economic reasons for local migration. On the one hand, a push factor which Dribe called the "career motive of migration", where a person aims to better their employment situation by, for example, acquiring a farm of their own. On the other hand, he identifies push factors such as the loss of employment or being forced to leave one's home. Dribe, M. (2003) "Migration of Rural Families in 19th Century Southern Sweden", 255. The motives for migration *within* a village have been discussed less than the incentives for out-migration. With 'local' migration, Dribe also refers to migration to villages in close proximity to a person's place of origin.

ent household in the same village. Usually both spouses left their parental home to live in a new house, in the immediate vicinity of their close relatives. Besides marriage, individuals could also move within the community to go and live in the household of relatives or in a municipal institution. Moving in with relatives or to an institution seems to have been an important survival strategy for singles and widow(er)s. The singles moving within the borders of their hometown most often migrated after the death of their parents to the household of a sibling or another relative. In particular, if a person had no siblings or all the siblings had left the parental household, the person almost always decided to move. Similarly, the death of a partner could encourage a person to move, especially if a widow(er) had reached old age and had no co-residing children.<sup>125</sup> In both cases, we can assume that it was not straightforward for singles to support themselves, which made them look for co-residential housing for their survival. Individuals probably preferred moving to a house of relatives living close by. In the absence of relatives, a municipal institution might have been a final solution. Other possible incentives for inside migration may have been the possibility of moving to a house with better housing conditions or the necessity of leaving one's home due to financial difficulties. In particular, individuals moving numerous times for short periods of time within the same municipality, as in the example of Joseph Louis Schiets, give the impression that some struggled to pay for their housing.

Similar incentives may have played a part in out-migration. As in in-migration, out-migration could be the result of marriage: if a person's spouse had a different place of residence, the person could move to the spouse's hometown. Similarly, when there were no relatives available nearby, individuals could out-migrate to the houses of relatives living further away.<sup>126</sup> For example, Anne Catherine Vanderhaeghen, born deaf in Denderhoutem in 1748, died in the house of her nephew Henricus De Cuyper in Welle in 1829. Without living parents and siblings in the municipality of Denderhoutem, her nephew living less than 4 kilometres away in Welle may well have been her closest liv-

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<sup>125</sup> M. Neven analysed the migration behaviour of elderly people in the Land of Herve (Belgium) in the second half of the nineteenth century. She showed that old-age migration was relatively common as many elderly people moved to live with children. Never-married elderly persons, on the other hand, were more likely to live alone, and their mobility and destinations were less often known. Neven, M. (2003) "Terra Incognita: Migration of the Elderly and the Nuclear Hardship Hypothesis" *The History of the Family*, 8/2, 267-95.

<sup>126</sup> George Alter et al. showed that the presence of kin had an important impact on the decision of women to migrate. An increase in the size of the kin network significantly reduced the likelihood of out-migration of married and widowed women. Alter, G., Capron, C., Neven, M. & Oris, M. (2002) "When Dad Died: Household Economy and Family Culture in Nineteenth Century East Belgium" In: Derosas, R. & Oris, M. (eds.) *When Dad Died. Individuals and Families Coping with Distress in Past Societies*. Bern: Lang, 389-420. Previously, David Kertzer came to similar conclusions for Italy. Kertzer, D., Hogan, D. & Karweit, N. (1992) "Kinship Beyond the Household in a Nineteenth-century Italian Town" *Continuity & Change*, 7, 1-19.

ing relative who could support her in old age. Similarly, Carola Callaert moved from Lebbeke to Buggenhout (5 kilometres) to live in the house of her nephew after the death of her last surviving sibling Philippus, with whom she lived in Lebbeke until his death in 1861. It seems that out-migration to the house of relatives was a logical consequence if there were no close relatives left in the municipality.<sup>127</sup> If a person was unfortunate enough not to have more distant relatives in close proximity, they could also out-migrate to an institution. Perhaps the lack of family was the reason why Joannes Franciscus De Brabander moved from Drongen to the convent in Lovendegem in 1869, when he became the only surviving member of his parental household. The institutions within the city of Ghent were identified as especially important destinations for deaf men and women. The wider range of more specialized institutions within cities may have incited individuals to choose for out-migration instead of entering a local institutional facility. Whether the move to an institution was the result of a personal choice or decided by others is difficult to determine. Out-migration, more so than inside migration, was driven by the search for (better) employment.<sup>128</sup> Nineteenth-century urbanization especially should be considered in this context, with the choice of destination largely determined by the better employment opportunities in the city. In the nineteenth century, the search for work encouraged many individuals to move outside the province, even outside Belgium, on a temporary and permanent basis. However, the fact that the majority of migrants still mainly moved to the nearest large city suggests that most migrants did not want to entirely break ties with family or their place of origin. Many migrants did return after some time (and sometimes repeatedly) to their hometown, indicating that social considerations were important as well.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> It would be inadequate to state that there were no more relatives living in the municipality as I do not know the whereabouts of all family members. However, based on the death dates of the parents and siblings I can make a reliable assessment of the availability of close relatives.

<sup>128</sup> Migration was identified as a viable strategy for dealing with economic stress by M. Oris, M. Neven and G. Alter in: Oris, M., Neven, M. & Alter, G. (2005) "Individuals and Communities Facing Economic Stress: A Comparison of Two Rural Areas in 19th Century Belgium" In: Allen, R.C., Bengtsson, T. & Dribe, M. (eds.) *Living Standards in the Past New Perspectives on Well-being in Asia and Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>129</sup> Matthys, C. (2013) "Dossier: migratie tussen stad en platteland". The importance of social networks in migrational decision-making was also illustrated by: Manfredini, M. (2003) "Families in Motion"; Choldin, H.M. (1973) "Kinship Networks In The Migration Process" *International Migration Review*, 7/2, 163-75; Ostergren, R.C. (1982) "Kinship Networks and Migration" *Social Science History*, 6/3, 293-320. Anthropologist R. Hubscher identified three networks which affected a person's decision to move and the destination of migration: family networks, village communities and professional networks, in: Hubscher, R. (2005) *L'immigration dans les campagnes françaises (XIXe-Xxe siècle)*. Paris: Odile Jacob, 65.



Similarly, temporary and permanent migrations are assumed to be driven by different incentives.<sup>130</sup> The motives for temporary migration were usually related to work: individuals, whether or not together with their families, moved to a destination with better employment opportunities. When they had earned sufficient income or when employment opportunities in the place of destination decreased, they returned to their place of origin. Although economic considerations undoubtedly played a role in permanent migration as well, permanent relocation has more often been represented as a response to life course events such as marriage, family formation and dissolution, retirement and institutionalization. However, the distinction between temporary and permanent migration in practice was probably less straightforward. Individuals or families who had intended to stay in a municipality only temporarily, may have decided to move permanently if the work at the destination proved more lucrative than expected.<sup>131</sup> Temporary migration could also assume a permanent character due to premature death. Franciscus Van Damme, for example, moved from Kalken to Metz (Germany) as part of his military training. Most likely he was to return to Kalken after his military service, but instead he died at the military hospital of Metz at the age of 19. Therefore his presumably temporary migration acquired a permanent character in the sources.

In the analysis, I have not distinguished between solitary and collective migration, although we can assume that the decision to migrate was heavily influenced by whether the individual had to move on their own or in the company of others. In this regard, I have argued that individuals, especially deaf men and women, were more likely to out-migrate once married, thus in the company of one's family. Singles migrated within and outside their place of residence both together with others and on their own. Those individuals migrating together usually moved together with the relatives they shared a household with. Among the deaf singles, it was more common to change institutional residence together with other co-residents of the institution. Doubts may be raised about the extent to which this 'collective' migration was the result of a personal decision. Although most of the co-residing individuals migrated with the household they lived in, some life courses indicate that individuals could stay behind or migrate individually. For example, Alphonse Van Goethem, born deaf in De Klinge in 1847, lived in the household of his widowed aunt Maria Theresia Van Goethem after the death of his father in 1888. In December 1891 his aunt remarried and moved to the house of her new husband. Alphonse did not join her, but continued to live in her house. However, most

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<sup>130</sup> See for example: Bell, M. & Ward, G. (2000) "Comparing Temporary Mobility with Permanent Migration" *Tourism Geographies*, 2/1, 97-107. Although a non-historic study, the arguments put forward by the authors can easily be applied to historical migration patterns.

<sup>131</sup> Fuchs, R.G. (2005) *Gender and Poverty in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, 103.

of the singles who migrated did so on their own – although few individuals lived on their own at the place of destination. Usually they went to live in the house of a relative or in the case of the deaf, in an institution. Still, the question remains, to what extent was migration the outcome of a personal decision rather than economic necessity?

#### **6.2.4.4 Summary**

In this section, I have established some quantitative characteristics of the migration behaviour of the research population. The focus has been primarily on the migrants moving out of their hometown, whether temporarily or permanently – considering that migration between villages is more easily to ascertain in the sources than migration within a village. I showed that this group of out-migrants was small in the first birth cohort – the vast majority of individuals moved within the municipality or led a sedentary life – but increased in the second half of the nineteenth century to about one-third to half the population (tables 6.6 and 6.7). Personal characteristics such as the presence of an auditory impairment, civil status and gender affected the out-migration behaviour of individuals in important ways.

In the first birth cohort deaf individuals, both married and unmarried, were more likely to out-migrate compared to the hearing siblings. I related this difference to the fact that more deaf men married to a spouse who was born in a different municipality (marriage migration) and the observation that more deaf singles reached old age, increasing their opportunities (and necessity) to migrate. In the second half of the nineteenth century, however, differences between the deaf and sibling cohort became smaller as migration increased in both cohorts but most substantially in the hearing cohorts (especially among the brothers). Parallel to the increase in out-migration, individuals from the second birth cohort moved more frequently during their adult lives (tables 6.8 and 6.10). While a large group of married people in the first birth cohort moved only once or twice, it became more common for individuals in the second cohort to migrate more, especially in the deaf cohort. Of the married deaf, 60 percent moved five or more times during their lives, compared to 32 percent of the married siblings. I have related this difference to a higher ratio of deaf individuals working within more ‘mobile’ occupations and the smaller average family size of the deaf. Among the singles the frequency of migration was generally lower as many singles continued to live in the parental house after the death of their parents. Slightly more deaf singles moved more frequently, which may be the outcome of their higher institutionalization.

The increase in out-migration in the nineteenth century was mainly the outcome of a rising number of temporary migrations. Although most of the out-migrations were still permanent, the gap between the number of temporary and permanent migrations de-

creased in the second half of the nineteenth century. Differences in the research population became clear when dividing the group according to civil status. Deaf individuals were less likely to engage in temporary migration before marriage than the siblings. This suggests that it may have been more difficult for deaf men and women to move before marriage, as youngsters usually migrated unaccompanied. In addition, the long period of education in a deaf school may also account for this difference. However, once married, more deaf couples engaged in temporary migration (15 percent to 8 percent of the siblings). Temporary migration was less common for deaf and hearing singles, who more often moved permanently. Both in temporary and permanent migration, the singles exhibited no univocal characteristics and differences between the deaf and hearing population were limited.

At the same time as the rise in temporary migration and migration frequency, there was also a general increase in migration to the cities, outside East Flanders and Belgium (table 6.12). I have related the urbanization trend among the deaf to increased institutionalization, while better employment opportunities were probably the main incentive for the siblings to move to the city. Deaf individuals were less likely to leave the province of East Flanders, which suggests that deafness may have been an important obstacle for people to undertake long-distance migrations. There may also have been fewer incentives for deaf persons to move outside of the province. Differences in the migration distance between the deaf and hearing population became apparent alongside civil status. While singles travelled over larger differences in the sibling cohort, deaf individuals moved to a farther municipality more easily when married.

Regarding the motives for migration we are mostly left to conjecture. Migration, both within and between municipalities, may have been the outcome of decisions concerning marriage, employment and survival strategies. In the absence of more qualitative source materials, it is difficult to make statements about the different motives that drove deaf and hearing persons to move. Nonetheless, the analysis of the migration destinies suggests that institutionalization and co-residence were more important incentives for deaf men and women to move, while more siblings seem to have moved in search for (better) employment.

## 6.3 Social mobility: social networks of family and friends

In the previous sections on household composition and migration I explored with whom the research population lived in the different phases of their life courses, and how this was reflected in their migration behaviour – what I called their *physical* mobility. By consequence, the analyses have concentrated exclusively on the relationship of the deaf and siblings with their immediate surroundings: the household they lived in. So far, social relationships that extend beyond the household received little attention. So in the second part of this chapter, I examine the broader *social* mobility of the deaf and hearing population. The first section (6.3.1) scrutinizes the social networks of the research population by means of quantitative analyses of the witnesses present at important life events such as marriage and death. The second section (6.3.2) explores the social life and leisure opportunities for deaf men and women from a qualitative perspective using contemporary newspaper articles.

### 6.3.1 A quantitative analysis of social networks and family ties

The analysis of the household composition in the previous section has shed light on the relationship of single and married individuals with the members of their household. Although we can assume that household members were the most important source of social contact, I argued in the introduction that non-co-residing family and friends were an integral part of a person's social network as well. In contrast to the relationship with housemates, the social network of extended family and friends is more difficult to reconstruct, mainly due to the nature of the source material.

Most studies on friendship and family relations have been based on qualitative sources such as diaries, letters and memoirs, in which the authors describe their social events and friendship ties. By making use of these sources, studies have therefore focused almost exclusively on the upper classes of society.<sup>132</sup> The question arises as to what extent these findings, which are valuable nonetheless, can be generalized to the broader strata of society, or to specific groups such as the disabled.

In an attempt to circumvent the scarcity and bias of sources, scholars have explored the possibilities of demographic sources. When a life event, such as a birth, marriage or death was formalized by registration in the civil registers, the presence of two witnesses

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<sup>132</sup> Bras, H. (2011) "Intensification of Family Relations? Changes in the Choice of Marriage Witnesses in the Netherlands, 1830-1950" *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis*, 8/4, 103.

(in the case of birth and death) or four witnesses (in case of marriage) was required. As the selection of witnesses was not restricted by regulations, a person's *choice* of witnesses can reveal information about the person's social network.

Previous research on marriage witnesses indicates that until the beginning of the nineteenth century most witnesses were not related to the couple, especially in an urban context. Either they were professional witnesses, presenting themselves to the couple to earn some extra money, or they were men associated with the municipality or local personalities such as shopkeepers, innkeepers and notables. However, in the course of the nineteenth century the percentage of family witnesses, in particular lateral relatives such as brothers, brothers-in-law and cousins, rose dramatically and particularly in the higher and middle classes.<sup>133</sup> Different explanations have been given to account for this intensification of family relations. Some point to social class formation, political modernization and the breakthrough of industrial capitalism, which led to the increasing importance of social standing and class.<sup>134</sup> Others relate the intensification to "*the cult of domesticity*" and "*familiarization*", referring to the growing fondness for the cultivation of family ties as an escape from the increasing standardization and rationalization in an industrial society.<sup>135</sup> The transformation of the life phase of young adulthood and a new approach to marriage may explain the increased sociability among age peers, according to Bras. With industrialization and the growth of job opportunities in factories and services, youngsters became more independent of their parents as they were able to earn their own wages. Leisure time and an ethos of consumption became an integral part of a growing youth culture, which stimulated spending time with peers. The development of communication and transportation increased opportunities for keeping in contact with family and friends. Families that were, moreover, becoming larger as mortality rates were declining and fertility remained high. All this made it easier to choose a family member as a witness at marriage.<sup>136</sup>

In contrast to the intensification of family ties in the general population, the nineteenth century has been perceived as a period in which disabled individuals became 'outsiders' and excluded from community and family life. This segregation process has been related

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<sup>133</sup> Bras, H. (2011) "Intensification of Family Relations?", 104.

<sup>134</sup> Sabeau, D.W. (2007) "Kinship and Class Dynamics in Nineteenth-Century Europe" In: Sabeau, D.W., Teuscher, S. & Mathieu, J. (eds.) *Kinship in Europe. Approaches to Long-Term Development (1300-1900)*. New York: Berghahn Books; Davidoff, L. (2006) "Close Marriage in the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Middle Strata" In: Ebehtahaj, F., Lindley, B. & M. Richards (eds.) *Kinship Matters*. Oxford/Portland: Hart Publishing.

<sup>135</sup> Gillis, J.R. (1996) *A world of Their Own Making. Myth, Ritual and the Quest for Family Values*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

<sup>136</sup> Bras, H. (2011) "Intensification of Family Relations?", 108-10.

to the increased institutionalization of people with disabilities. Although the institutional life was geared towards better integration in society, the result was often the opposite. In the course of the nineteenth century, more and more children with disabilities grew up in boarding schools, socially and physically segregated from their family and home community. Moreover, Iain Hutchison describes how the motivation for personal involvement with a close friend or relative with a disability was increasingly undermined. Hearing people were, according to Hutchison, increasingly discouraged to engage in relationships with disabled people due to “*the increasing impact of population movement prompted by industrial expansion, urbanisation, and emigration, and because of financial pressures that remained for many families*”.<sup>137</sup> Moreover, dogmas such as eugenics, which depicted people with disabilities as imperfect and inferior, and medicalization processes, which labelled disabled people as abnormal and in need of supervision, further damaged the social network opportunities for people with disabilities.

The previous section has partly contradicted the assumption that deaf individuals were primarily dependent on institutions for support in the nineteenth century. Based on the household composition, I determined that parents and siblings remained the most important source of assistance for the majority of deaf men and women and that institutionalization was to a significant extent the result of the absence of available kin. Nonetheless, a person’s parents and siblings represent the inner core of their social network, making these ties the most difficult to cut. It may have been the weaker relationships, with more distant relatives and friends, which were more severely tested by nineteenth-century developments.

### 6.3.1.1 Analysing social networks: sources and methodology

In this section I combine information about the life courses of a group of deaf and hearing individuals with information about the witnesses at their marriages and deaths. In contrast to previous research in which attention to death certificates is limited, death witnesses are examined as well. It can be argued that studying the witnesses of death certificates is less valuable as the deceased did not choose them. However, a prospective analysis indicated that the individuals acting as a death witness were presumably the ones that ascertained the death. Previously Jan Kok also pointed out that the declaration of a death could only be done by a person who had personal knowledge of the death, generally a relative or acquaintance.<sup>138</sup> Studying death witnesses can thus reveal infor-

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<sup>137</sup> Hutchison, I. (2007) *A History of Disability in Nineteenth-Century Scotland*. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 324.

<sup>138</sup> Kok, J. (2006) “Sources for the Historical Demography of The Netherlands in the 19th and early 20th Centuries” In: Chuang, Y.-C., Engelen, T. & Wolf, A. (eds.) *Positive or Preventive. Fertility Developments in Taiwan and the Netherlands, 1850-1950*. Amsterdam: Aksant, 43.

mation about the extent to which individuals kept in contact with their family and were socially connected with their surroundings. Taking into account the low marriage rates of the deaf, death certificates are a necessary complement to collecting social network data. The nature of this study implies that only the research individuals for whom information on the witnesses present at marriage and/or death is available are qualified for analysis. Table 6.13 shows the absolute number of deaf and hearing research individuals included in the analysis.

**Table 6.13** Absolute numbers of research individuals with recorded witnesses

N=	Deaf		Siblings	
	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 1	Cohort 2
	132	122	129	130
<b>Married</b>				
Marriage witnesses	0	2	9	21
Death witnesses	0	1	8	5
Both	27	16	83	61
<b>Unmarried</b>				
Death witnesses	105	103	29	43
<i>% total population</i>	95	84	93	90

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Information on the witnesses is derived from marriage and death certificates. As today, a married couple was free to choose the witnesses present at their marriage, but some formal rules were relevant. The marriage certificates in the parish registers record the names of two witnesses. From 1778 onwards, the places of residence of the witnesses were recorded as well, and the witnesses were required to sign the marriage certificate. Under French rule (1796) civil registration was introduced to replace parish registers. From that moment until 1907 four witnesses were required to contract a marriage. In 1908 it was stipulated that two witnesses were sufficient. During the French period women were allowed to act as marriage witnesses, but for the largest part of the nineteenth century women were not valid witnesses.<sup>139</sup> Only three marriage witnesses in the analysis are female. The relationship of each witness to the bride or groom, as well as information on their occupation, age and residence, was registered on the civil marriage certificate. This relationship could be familial, but neighbours and acquaintances could also act as witnesses. As the witnesses were supposed to vouch for the contents of a declaration, the registrar preferred reliable witnesses such as friends or relatives and un-

<sup>139</sup> Matthijs, K. (2003) "Demographic and Sociological Indicators of Privatisation of Marriage in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in Flanders" *European Journal of Population*, 19/4, 391-2.

trustworthy persons could be refused.<sup>140</sup> In contrast to marriage, no witnesses were recorded in the burial parish certificates. Only with the introduction of civil registration were two witnesses required to register a death. Similar to a marriage certificate, death certificates contain information about a witness's age, occupation, residence and relationship to the deceased. As mentioned above, the witnesses were generally individuals from the dead person's circle of close friends and relatives who personally certified the death.

In the analysis I distinguish between five categories of witnesses, based on the distinction made in the certificates themselves: witnesses were categorized as *neighbour*, *acquaintance* or *not related* to the couple/deceased. Not related could imply that the witness and the individual did not personally know each other (e.g. if the witness was a professional witness) or could merely signify that the witness was not kin, but perhaps otherwise related to the couple or the deceased. In case of a relative the specific family relationship (e.g. father, brother, nephew) was noted in the certificate, but in the analysis they are aggregated under the category *family*. In the analysis of marriage witnesses, all witnesses related to the bride or groom are categorized as family. When no relationship was mentioned, the witness's relationship to the individual was classified as *unknown*.<sup>141</sup>

The focus is on the extent to which deaf persons were able to keep in contact with family and build a network that was socially varied. This implies a two-fold analysis:

Analysis 1: the frequency and nature of family and friendship ties,

Analysis 2: the probability of having a related witness present at the time of marriage or death.

To confirm the hypothesis of a more segregated life for the deaf individuals, results should point to a lower probability of having a related witness in the deaf cohort and a rising number of 'strangers' as witnesses in the course of the nineteenth century. The control group of siblings is expected to fit in with previous research findings on witnesses: a higher number of related witnesses, parallel with an intensification of lateral kin relationships in the course of the nineteenth century.<sup>142</sup>

### *Analysis 1*

The frequency of and preference for certain family members and the characteristics of unrelated witnesses are represented in cross tabulations. The cross tabulations distin-

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<sup>140</sup> Kok, J. (2006) "Sources for the Historical Demography".

<sup>141</sup> However, if the family name of the witness corresponded to the family name of the deceased or spouse, the witness was considered to be family.

<sup>142</sup> Lateral kinship ties: e.g. brother, brother-in-law and nephew; vertical kinship ties: e.g. father, uncle, grandfather, son



guish between a pre-industrial (married or died before 1850) and an industrial (married or died after 1850) cohort, the deaf and sibling cohort and for some analyses between men and women.<sup>143</sup> While the reconstruction of family ties is quite easy, assessing the nature of amicable relationships proves to be more challenging. Determining whether two individuals even knew each other on a personal level, based on the limited information available in the certificates, is difficult. The analysis starts from the premise that friendship ties developed mainly between people belonging to the same generation, and usually between people from the same municipality, which could indicate friends growing up together. Regarding the potential to form friendships, the emphasis is on occupation, with the assumption that friendship and social networks in the past were correlated to occupation types. Unrelated witnesses with a similar age, from the same municipality and in the same occupational group are considered more likely to be personal friends. A diminishing correspondence in age, occupation and residence thus points to increasing segregation and social isolation.

### *Analysis 2*

The probability of having a related witness is determined through binary logistic regression methods.<sup>144</sup> Binary logistic regression is a type of regression analysis where the dependent variable is a dummy variable (coded 0, 1). In the binary logistic regression, the dependent variable is the presence of at least one related witness. This relation can refer to the witness being a family member, a neighbour or an acquaintance. The analysis thus assumes a binary outcome: an individual either has no related witnesses (0) or at least one related witness (1). Several covariates are assumed to have a predictive power on the outcome. The impact of the presence of a disability and time cohort take a central position in the analysis, but other variables such as gender, residential situation and number of siblings may have an effect as well. These covariates are discussed before the presentation of the results of the regression analysis (6.3.1.3).

#### **6.3.1.2 The frequency and nature of family and amicable ties (analysis 1)**

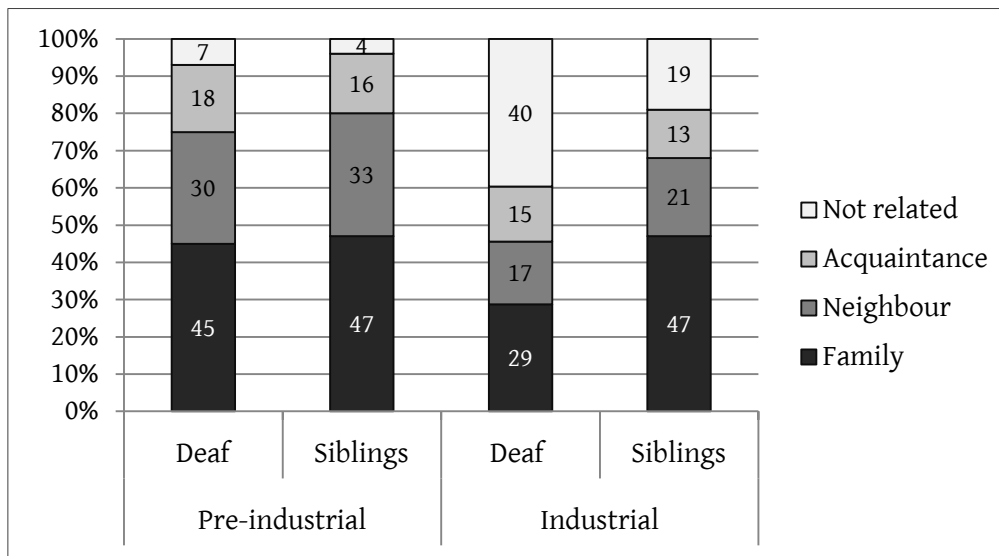
Who witnessed the marriages and deaths of the research individuals? Figures 6.4 and 6.6 give a general overview of the frequency of different relationships within the deaf and control group, divided over two cohorts.

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<sup>143</sup> In contrast to the previous analyses, I distinguish between two cohorts based on the marriage/death date instead of the birth date of the individuals. This alternative division into *event* cohorts is designed to deal with the large variation in marriage and death dates of the individuals born in the same cohort.

<sup>144</sup> As I am not interested in the *duration* until the event the use of Cox regression models is unsuitable.

**Figure 6.4** Relationship of the death witnesses according to cohort and disability, in %



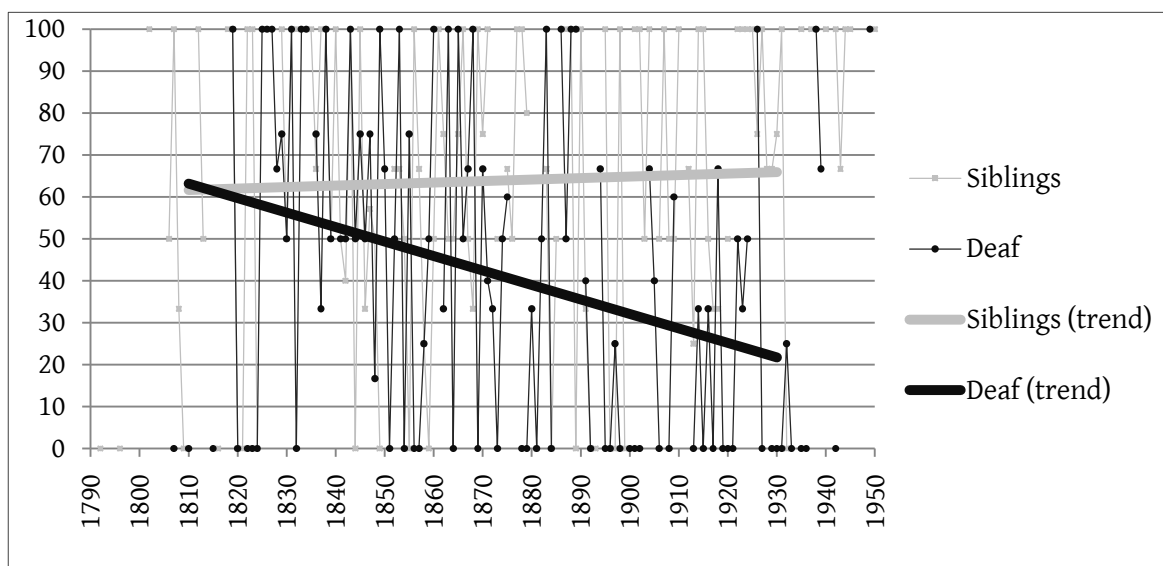
Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Notes: The percentages are based on the number of witnesses, not on the number of research individuals with a witness belonging to that category. For that reason the total number of witnesses is about double (death) and four (marriage) times as high as the number of research subjects. The unknown cases are not considered.<sup>145</sup>

Figure 6.4 shows an increase in the percentage of witnesses not related to the deceased in both the industrial deaf and sibling cohort. This rise in unrelated witnesses may partly be explained by civil officials being less accurate: witnesses previously recorded as neighbour or acquaintance may have been placed under the more general term not related, which could also account for the lower frequency of neighbours and acquaintances in the second cohort. Nevertheless, the far more substantial increase among the deaf (33 percent increase as opposed to 15 percent) indicates that the rise cannot be solely due to potential administrative changes. This proliferation of ‘strangers’ runs parallel with a decline in the number of family members witnessing the death of a deaf relative (-16 percent). Among the brothers and sisters of the deaf, however, percentages remain the same, indicating family remained important. The development through time of the percentages of death certificates with at least one family witness, as shown in figure 6.5, confirms this pattern.

<sup>145</sup> Unknown cases in the pre-industrial cohort: 24 witnesses in the deaf cohort, 19 witnesses in the sibling cohort; in the industrial cohort: 56 witnesses in the deaf cohort, 31 witnesses in the sibling cohort.

**Figure 6.5** Yearly percentages of death certificates with at least one family witness, 1792-1952 (siblings N=149, deaf N=111)<sup>146</sup>



Source: MS Access database, research individual file

In both the deaf and sibling cohort, neighbours and acquaintances lost importance in the course of the nineteenth century. This development therefore seems related to a more general trend to be less embedded in society, which corresponds to an assumed nineteenth-century individualization and loss of solidarity. Based on figure 6.4, we can tentatively state that before industrialization the support deaf individuals experienced at death was similar support to their siblings. However, nineteenth-century developments had a negative effect on general social connectivity, for the deaf in particular.

A characteristic which may have had a major influence on the distribution of witnesses at death is civil status. Indeed, it seems likely that a married person had a larger pool of available kin who could act as witnesses at death. To test this assumption and refine my previous observations, in table 6.14 I have related the distribution of the death witnesses over the different categories to civil status. Witnesses with an unknown relationship to the deceased are not taken into account.

<sup>146</sup> For each year, I calculated the ratio between the number of deaths with family present and the total number of deaths in the research population that year. So, each dot refers to the percentage of death certificates with family present for the corresponding year. The gaps in the figure can be explained by the absence of deaths in certain years. The problem of the large number of years without or with only a few deaths, making the graphs difficult to interpret, is handled by adding trend lines. The trend lines are based on the values for the period 1810-1930. By excluding the periods with a very low number of deaths, the trend lines provide a more comprehensive picture of nineteenth-century evolutions.

**Table 6.14** Relationship of the witnesses at death according to civil status, in %

	Pre-industrial				Industrial			
	Deaf (N=144)		Siblings (N=124)		Deaf (N=360)		Siblings (N=334)	
	M	UM	M	UM	M	UM	M	UM
Family	42	45	52	37	43	26	50	38
Neighbour	47	27	21	55	12	18	24	15
Acquaintance	11	19	21	8	16	14	7	28
Not related	0	9	6	0	29	42	19	19
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

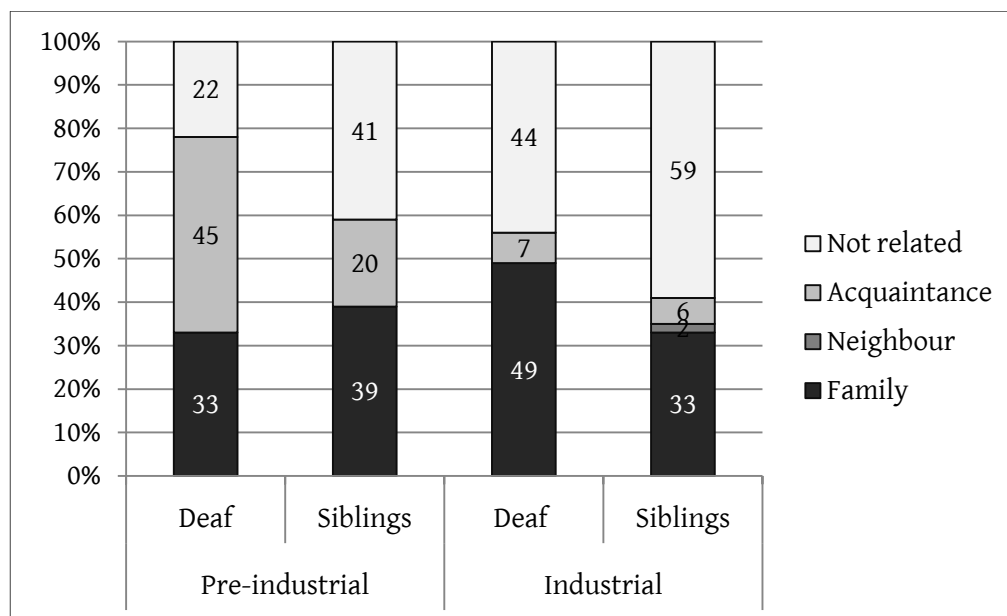
Notes: The 'N' of each category refers to the number of witnesses, not to the number of research individuals with a witness belonging to that category. For that reason the total number of witnesses is about twice as high as the number of research subjects. The unknown cases are not considered in the calculation of percentages.

Table 6.14 confirms for all cohorts, except the pre-industrial deaf, that if a person was (or had been) married then there was more likely to be a relative present at death. For a single person who died in old age, with no living parents and few siblings around, relatives were probably scarce in comparison to married individuals who could count on a spouse, children, children-in-law and possibly even grandchildren. Among married deaf people, family remained just as important in the course of the nineteenth century, whereas for the deaf singles there was a significant decrease in related witnesses. Thus the decline in related witnesses shown in figure 6.4 is only applicable to the unmarried deaf population (which was nonetheless the majority). Unrelated witnesses became more important in both the married and unmarried cohorts in the industrial period. However, percentages in the deaf cohort were substantially higher compared to those in the sibling cohort. While a considerable number of hearing singles was able to rely on family and acquaintances at death, deaf singles were more exclusively dependent on unrelated witnesses.

With these considerations in mind, the frequencies shown in the analysis of the marriage witnesses in figure 6.6 are easier to interpret. The rise in the number of family members acting as marriage witnesses among the deaf (+16 percent) points to an intensification of family relations, which contradicts the results based on the death certificates. However, to put this finding into perspective, it should be remembered that deaf individuals finding a life partner already constituted an exceptional group as they were socially integrated enough to marry, unlike the vast majority of unmarried deaf. Moreover, the small amount of deaf marriages with witnesses with a known relationship to the couple in the first cohort (37 percent) makes the result debatable. At the same time, the number of unrelated witnesses increased even higher (+22 percent). The increase in both family and unrelated marriage witnesses is accounted for by the sharp decrease in

acquainted witnesses (-38 percent). Initially the most important category of marriage witnesses, acquaintances lost their prominence in the industrial period.

**Figure 6.6** Relationship of the marriage witnesses according to cohort and disability, in %



Source: MS Access database, research individual file

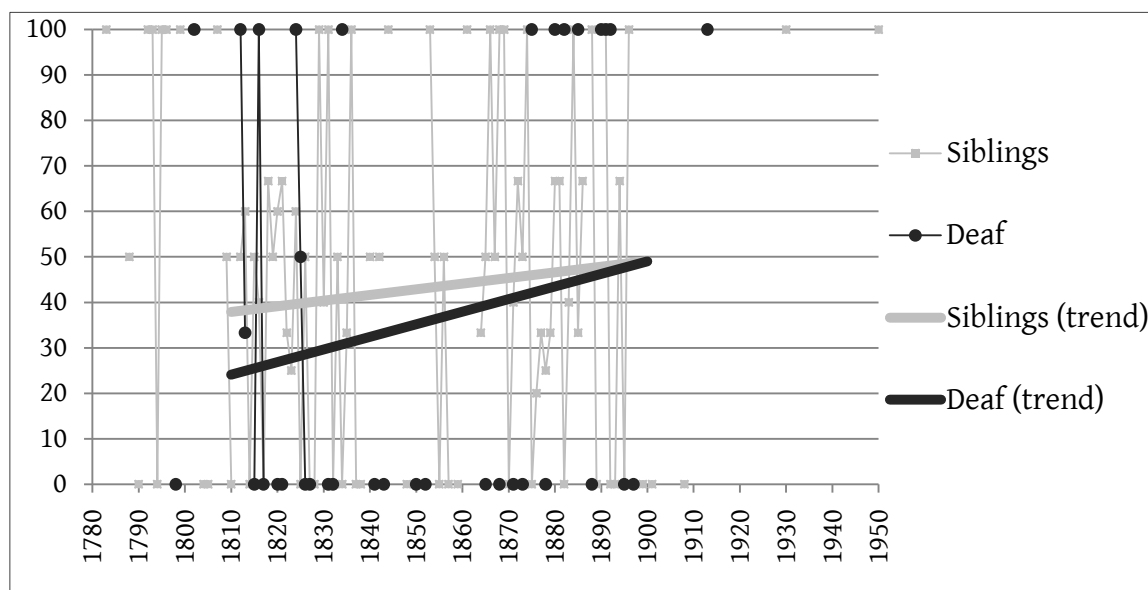
In line with previous research, I expect the number of family witnesses in the sibling cohort to rise during the nineteenth century. However, comparing the first to the second time period shows the opposite trend, as the number of family witnesses decreased by 6 percent, while the number of unrelated witnesses to the bride and groom rose by 18 percent – an increase made possible by the diminishing number of acquainted witnesses. However, if I plot the percentages of marriages with at least one family witness on a yearly basis, as shown in figure 6.7, we find a different picture.

Figure 6.7 shows that having a family member as a witness became more common in both cohorts in the course of the nineteenth century.<sup>147</sup> Apparently the absolute number of family witnesses decreased, but they were spread over more marriages. However, the

<sup>147</sup> For each year, I calculated the ratio between the number of marriages with family present and the total number of marriages in the research population that year. So, each dot refers to the percentage of marriage certificates with family present for the corresponding year. The gaps in the figure can be explained by the absence of marriages in certain years. The problem of the large number of years without or with only a few marriages, making the graphs difficult to interpret, is handled by adding trend lines. The trend lines are based on the values for the period 1810-1900, although the data is actually spread over the period 1783-1943. The number of marriages at the beginning and at the end of the period of observation is very low. By excluding these periods, the trend lines provide a more comprehensive picture of nineteenth-century evolutions.

increase was much more pronounced in the deaf cohort. From the 1880s the percentage of deaf marriages with a relative present was in fact higher than in the sibling cohort. Overall, the analysis of the marriage witnesses provides no evidence of a weaker social embedding of the deaf. On the contrary even, as the percentages of unrelated witnesses in both sibling cohorts were higher, and the number of family witnesses in the deaf marriages exceeded those of the siblings in the industrial cohort.

**Figure 6.7** Yearly percentages of marriage certificates with at least one family witness, 1783-1943 (siblings N=85, deaf N=21)



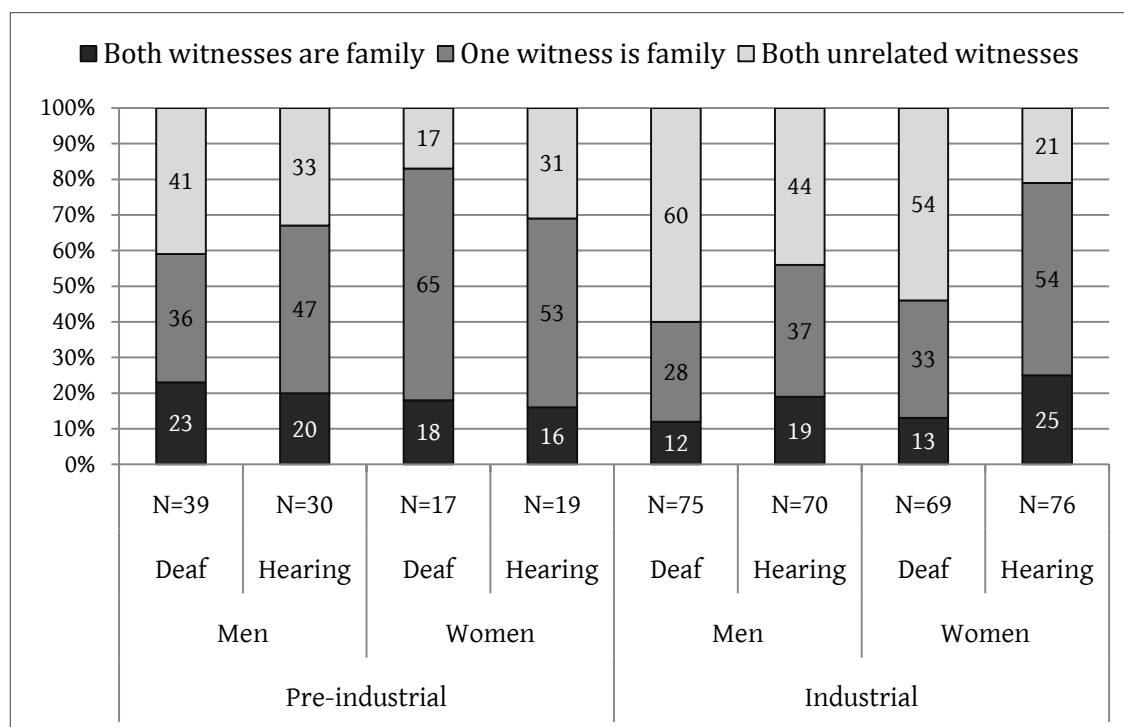
Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Next I look more closely at the characteristics of the different categories of witnesses. Were there changes in the preference for certain family members and to what extent can unrelated witnesses assumed to be friends? The focus is first on family witnesses and then on unrelated witnesses (6.3.1.2.2).

### 6.3.1.2.1 Next of kin: the study of family relations

Figures 6.8 and 6.9 present the percentages of deaf and hearing siblings according to the number of family witnesses at death and at marriage.

**Figure 6.8** Frequency of family witnesses at death according to cohort, disability and gender, in %



Source: MS Access database, research individual file

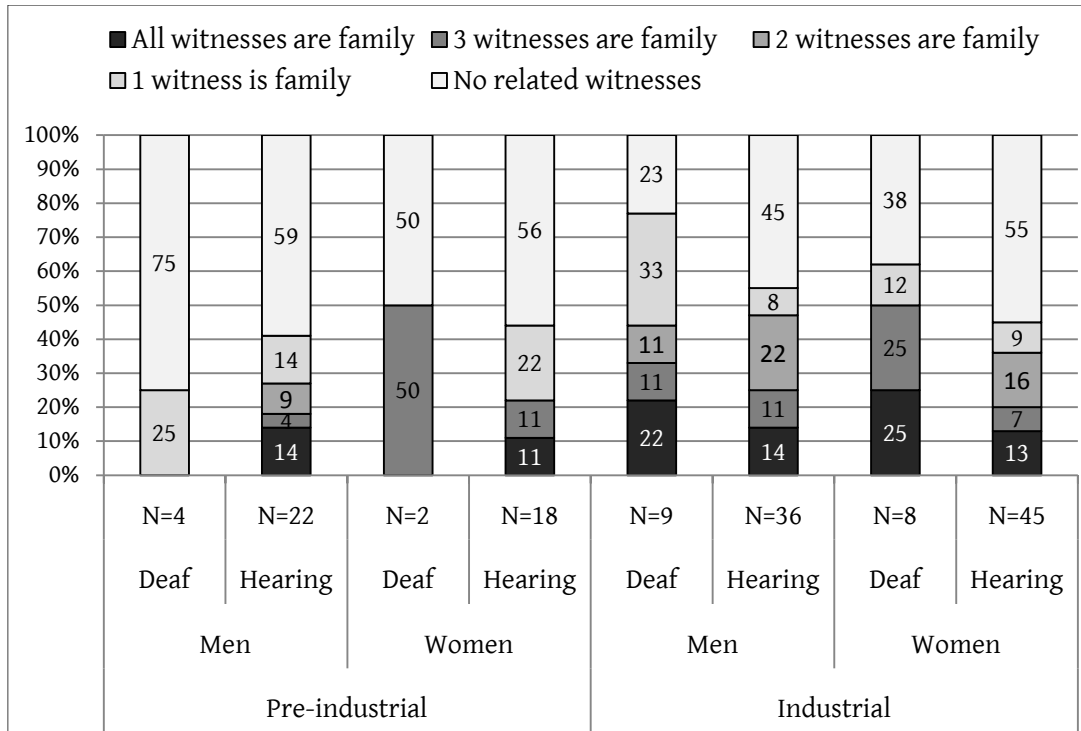
Notes: Witnesses with an unknown relation to the deceased are left out the analysis, hence the smaller numbers.

Figure 6.8 shows that, in both time cohorts, it was common for the deaf men to have two unrelated death witnesses (41 percent and 60 percent). While the difference with having one related witness was initially limited, this gap became more clear-cut in the industrial cohort. More deaf women had at least one family witness at death, especially in the pre-industrial period. This suggests deaf women relied more easily on family than deaf men. This gender difference may be related to the fact that a larger number of deaf women lived together with family, while more deaf men lived together with non-kin or were institutionalized (see table 6.4 and 6.2.3.2). Moreover, if the deaf were married, a husband could act as a witness in the death certificate of his wife but not vice versa. Thus if there were no (adult) children nearby, it was harder for deaf men to have a related witness signing their death certificate. The comparably higher number of related death witnesses in the female sibling cohort indicates that having a related witness at death was a characteristic of women in general, not of deaf women in particular. In the course of the nineteenth century, however, deaf women almost ‘caught up’ the difference with deaf men, by experiencing an even higher increase in unrelated death witnesses (+37 percent).

Among the siblings, across both time cohorts, family played a more important role as the majority had at least one family member as a death witness. In the course of the nineteenth century, sibling brothers had two unrelated death witnesses more often, in

contrast to the female sibling group, where there was a decrease in the deaths with two unrelated witnesses. Nevertheless, the percentage of hearing brothers and especially sisters having only unrelated witnesses remained lower than for the death of their deaf sibling.

**Figure 6.9** Frequency of family witnesses at marriage according to cohort, disability and gender, in %



Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Notes: Witnesses with an unknown relation to the deceased are left out the analysis, hence the smaller numbers.

With regard to marriage witnesses, the findings point in the opposite direction. Ignoring the low number of analysable marriages, the number of marriages with only unrelated witnesses drops significantly in the deaf cohort, especially for the men. In the course of the nineteenth century, it became more common for deaf brides and grooms to have at least one family member present at their wedding, in many of the weddings even more than one. In the sibling cohort we also find a decrease in the number of marriages with only unrelated witnesses in the male cohort; in the female cohort the ratio is unchanged. This observation suggests that the increase in marriages with at least one family member, as shown in figure 6.7, only applies to the brothers. The percentage of marriages with only unrelated witnesses was substantially higher in the sibling cohort compared to the deaf one. We also find a higher number of deaf and hearing women in the second cohort with no relatives present at their wedding, compared to the men. Perhaps this is the result of the weaker position of women on the marriage market.



The next step in the analysis of the role of family in a person's social network is to look at which family ties were stronger than others. Based on the analysis of household composition, I concluded that either a person's spouse and children or their parents and siblings constituted the most important family connections in the lives of the deaf and hearing men and women – given that they usually shared a residence with these relatives. Based on this observation, it would be interesting to examine whether husbands, fathers and brothers acted as witnesses more frequently than other relatives. If the death and marriage certificates reveal a greater variety of relatives acting as witnesses, this can tell us something about the relationships the research individuals maintained with more distant relatives. The top three relatives mentioned in death and marriage certificates are presented in table 6.15.

**Table 6.15** Top 3 of relatives most often acting as witnesses at death/marriage according to cohort, disability and gender, in %

Death	Pre-industrial				Industrial			
	Deaf		Siblings		Deaf		Siblings	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
N=	36	18	30	19	43	44	57	84
1.	B (42)	B (39)	B (27)	H (53)	N (35)	N (36)	S (40)	S (37)
2.	N (36)	N (33)	S (20)	B (11)	B (14)	B (21)	B (21)	N (18)
3.	B-I-L (14)	F (22)	F (17)	S/B-I-L (10)	S/B-I-L (12)	S (11)	N (14)	H (12)
%	92	94	64	84	71	69	75	67
Marriage	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
N=	9	3	50	30	19	15	53	54
1.	B (45)	B (67)	B/B-I-L (18)	B-I-L (23)	B (42)	B (47)	B-I-L (30)	B-I-L (33)
2.	Fam-I-L (33)	B-I-L (33)	Fam-I-L (16)	Brother (20)	B-I-L (32)	B-I-L (33)	B (25)	B (22)
3.	B-I-L/C (11)	-	U-I-L (14)	N (13)	U-I-L (16)	U-I-L (20)	U-I-L (15)	U-I-L (9)
%	100	100	66	56	90	100	70	64

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Notes: The given percentages are always calculated based on the total number of family witnesses, which is mentioned in the upper row. Numbers are quite low as the majority of the deaf had unrelated witnesses. The percentage on the last row is the sum of the share of the top 3 relatives compared to all recorded family members. Abbreviations: B(-I-L): Brother(-in-law); C: Cousin; Fam-I-L: Family-in-law; F(-I-L): Father-in-law; H: Husband; N: Nephew; S(I-L): Son(-in-law); U(-I-L): Uncle(-in-law). The abbreviations referring to vertical kinship ties are in italics.

With regard to the family witnesses at death, we find that husbands, sons, fathers and brothers – thus the close relatives – indeed made up the most important relatives present at death. Sons and husbands acted as witnesses more often in the sibling cohorts. As the siblings were more often married, the higher numbers of husbands and sons is no surprise. The absence of spouses in the men’s top three can be attributed to the general absence of female witnesses in civil registration. The prominent role of brothers and brothers-in-law, especially in the deaf cohort, can be explained by the fact that many individuals, especially singles, lived in or together with a brother or married sister (hence brother-in-law). If a person died at a young age, they were probably still living with their parents, which can account for the presence of fathers in the top three.

However, besides these close relatives, a considerable percentage of men and women, especially in the deaf cohort, also had a nephew as a witness. The relationship with nephews is somewhat difficult to interpret as the Dutch word *neef* can refer to both a cousin, the son of an aunt or uncle – which implies a horizontal relationship with more or less an age peer – and a nephew, the son of a sibling – which implies a vertical relationship with a younger person. The large age gap between the deceased and the *neven* suggests that in most death certificates the person referred to was a nephew. Only those individuals dying in the house of their parents had cousins as witnesses. In the case of the deaf, there was usually a close connection to the nephew as they often lived in the same house. A deaf person with a nephew as a witness often lived together with a married sibling and his or her children. At his or her death, the brother(-in-law) and one of his sons attested the death for the municipality. In the discussion of the household composition, I also mentioned that nephews could take in deaf uncles and aunts after the death of their parents, who previously co-resided with them. However, deaf men and women did not always co-reside with their nephew witnesses, and never with their cousin witnesses. This suggests that the deaf men and women maintained social contacts with relatives beyond the borders of their household. For example, Jan Baptist Gees was born deaf in Kerksken in 1850 and died as a lodger in the household of an unrelated family, Vanderhaegen, in 1924. In his death certificate two nephews, aged 49 and 52, acted as witnesses. A similar pattern can be found in the sibling cohort, but nephews and cousins were generally less important as witnesses for the siblings as they had more close male relatives who could act as a witness, more particularly husbands and sons.

Looking at the percentages the top three relatives represent in relation to all recorded family members, we find no decline in the variety of social networks at death. Brothers, nephews, fathers and brothers-in-law were as good as the only recorded family members in the deaf cohort before 1850. After 1850 their proportion to the total number of family witnesses declined as more husbands, sons-in-law and uncles acted as a witness. In the sibling cohort, the variety in witnesses was larger before 1850 but comparable to the deaf cohort after 1850. Sons-in-law, fathers-in-law and grandsons were among those

not mentioned as witnesses. Although the small numbers involved require caution in drawing conclusions, they do not suggest the assumed decline in the variety of social networks of the deaf, but rather the opposite.

The analysis of marriage witnesses leads to similar conclusions. The differences between the deaf and their siblings as well as between men and women are limited. We only see a difference between the deaf and the siblings when we look at the variety of recorded family members. In the deaf cohort, variety was limited and the relatives mentioned in the top three constitute almost all recorded relatives. In the sibling cohort, the variety was larger. Besides brothers(-in-law) and uncles-in-law, uncles, nephews(-in-law) and fathers(-in-law) acted as witnesses as well. Compared to the death certificates, we find a higher number of relatives-in-law acting as a witness in marriage certificates. Both the bride and groom could present witnesses, so obviously the relatives of spouses acted as witnesses as well – and from the perspective of the research individual these are relatives-in-law. However, it is noteworthy that the number of relatives-in-law acting as witnesses exceeded the number of family witnesses in the deaf cohort and not in the sibling cohort. This could indicate that deaf research individuals had fewer of their own relatives to turn to and were therefore more dependent on the witnesses presented by their spouses.

Neither the top three of family witnesses at death nor those at marriage confirm the hypothesis of a lateralization of family ties. Age peers such as brothers(-in-law) were well-established witnesses in the pre-industrial cohort and nephews, sons and uncles-in-law who constitute a vertical kinship tie, made up a larger proportion of witnesses in the second time cohort. To test this hypothesis more accurately, the variables time cohort and family relationship-type are cross tabulated in table 6.16. For each deceased and married person with at least one family witness, I have determined whether they had only lateral witnesses, had more lateral than vertical related witnesses, had only vertical witnesses or had more vertical than lateral related witnesses. Those with an inclination towards lateral family witnesses were classified in the category *lateral*, those with a preference for vertical family witnesses in the category *vertical*. As such, the ‘N’ refers to the number of persons in the analysis with at least one kin witness, not to the number of family witnesses.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> The cross tabulation of the number of lateral and vertical witnesses in each time cohort produced similar results. Those individuals with an equal number of vertical and lateral kin witnesses (11 deaf individuals and 20 siblings) were excluded from the analysis.

Table 6.16 indicates an increase in the preference for lateral family witnesses at marriage in the industrial sibling cohort, but lateral witnesses were also the most common family relationships in the period before. The inclination towards lateral witnesses seems to have been the strongest in the deaf cohorts. Regarding the death witnesses, the table suggests an opposite development as the percentages of individuals with more vertical witnesses increased significantly in the industrial period. Siblings were slightly more inclined to have vertical witnesses at death. The higher frequency of sons as witnesses in the sibling cohort might account for the difference with deaf individuals.

**Table 6.16** Percentages of individuals with a preference for lateral or vertical family witnesses according to time cohort and disability, in %

Death	Deaf			Siblings		
	Lateral	Vertical	Total (N)	Lateral	Vertical	Total (N)
Pre-industrial	66	34	100 (38)	54	46	100 (37)
Industrial	35	65	100 (65)	26	74	100 (103)
Marriage	Lateral	Vertical	Total (N)	Lateral	Vertical	Total (N)
Pre-industrial	100	0	100 (7)	56	44	100 (36)
Industrial	100	0	100 (11)	82	18	100 (34)

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

The analysis of family witnesses has shown that fewer relatives were present at the death of deaf men and women in the course of the nineteenth century, while family remained as important in the sibling cohort. Grouping individuals according to civil status indicated that deaf singles in particular had a low number of related witnesses, while those who married saw little change in the period under observation. In the nineteenth century, it became more common for the bride and groom to have at least one family member present at their wedding, especially in the deaf cohort.

The analysis of preference for certain family members has only confirmed a shift to lateral kinship ties in the sibling cohort at marriage. Deaf men and women exhibited a smaller variety of marriage witnesses and seem to have been more reliant on the witnesses of their spouses. Generally, there was no decline in the variety of family networks. Apart from a lower availability of husbands and sons, deaf individuals had similar family members acting as witnesses. Most related death witnesses appear to have been relatives with whom the deceased was living in the same household at time of death, but not exclusively. The latter suggests that individuals kept in contact with relatives beyond the borders of their household.

### 6.3.1.2.2 Through thick and thin: the study of friendship ties

The nineteenth century was characterized by a general increase in unrelated witnesses at marriage and death. In this section, I examine who these unrelated witnesses were. Did they belong to the social network of the research population and how were they acquainted? From this point on, the analysis will focus on the witnesses classified in the registers as *not related* to the research population. Witnesses with an unrecorded (*unknown*) relationship to the research individual are not included, nor are neighbours and acquaintances. The origin of the affinity with neighbours is considered to be evident: spatial proximity. Acquaintances are not included either as they are already identified as being friends of the couple or the deceased. As I stated previously, neighbours and acquaintances were witnesses less often in the second half of the nineteenth century, both for marriages and deaths. The decrease was particularly marked for the deaf.

To investigate the possibility of unrelated witnesses being acquainted with the research population, I studied the similarities in occupation type, age and residence. The analysis started from the premise that friendship ties mainly developed between people belonging to the same generation, between people from the same municipality and between people belonging to the same occupational group.

Table 6.17 represents the correspondence in occupation, age and place of birth between the research population and their unrelated witnesses, divided into two time cohorts.<sup>149</sup> The much larger unrelated witness population in the industrial cohort is again a reflection of the general increase in unrelated witnesses in the course of the nineteenth century. Comparing the two time cohorts, we find a general increase in the number of death witnesses with a deviating occupation type in both the deaf and sibling cohort. However, the results need to be treated with caution. On the hand, the size of the unrelated witness population in the pre-industrial cohort is very small. On the other hand, as I discussed in Chapter 4, not all the occupations exercised by a person found their way into the sources. So although it may appear that the deceased and the witness never had a similar occupation, they may well have done so. The results for the industrial cohort are more reliable and indicate that few deceased individuals practiced or had practiced similar occupations to their witnesses. This observation suggests that the deceased and the witnesses did not meet in a working environment.

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<sup>149</sup> A correspondence in occupation type of people *without profession* was not considered to be the *same* occupation type. If a person died in old age, it is likely that they would be registered as *without profession* which makes it impossible to compare occupations. Therefore, I considered a research individual as having the *same* profession as the witness if the same occupation type was recorded for the research individual at one point in life. As the occupation at marriage is often the first available recording of occupation, only the occupation type at marriage is taken into account in the marriage analysis.

The accordance with age remains more or less the same across both time cohorts, with a slightly higher accordance for the deaf cohorts. Still, less than half of the deaf and sibling population had witnesses who were of a similar generation. Dying at an old age implies having peers who are also old, which may prevent them from being able to act as a witness. A large age gap does not rule out the possibility that the deceased and witnesses knew each other, but it makes it unlikely that their relationship was one of friendship. With regard to residence, the percentages point towards a higher accordance in the industrial period. In other words, more witnesses resided in the same municipality as in which the research person was born (and in almost all cases also died), increasing the probability of the two having known each other from an early age. However, as the age analysis indicates that there was an average age difference of 22 years in the deaf cohort and 25 years in the sibling cohort, it seems more plausible that the witnesses were only close in space, rather than on a personal level.

Comparing both research groups, we find a higher deviation with regard to occupation type in the deaf cohorts, but a larger group of witnesses within the same age group compared to their siblings. Fewer deaf individuals were born in the municipality in which they died (and from where their witnesses originated). In the previous section, I established that deaf individuals migrated more than the hearing population.

**Table 6.17** Correspondence between research individuals and unrelated witnesses according to occupation, age and residence, in %

Death	Pre-industrial						Industrial					
	Occupation		Generation		Residence		Occupation		Generation		Residence	
	D	S	D	S	D	S	D	S	D	S	D	S
<b>N=</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>58</b>
Same	33	25	44	25	89	25	7	14	43	31	49	64
Different	67	75	56	75	11	75	93	86	57	69	51	36
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>
<b>Marriage</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>S</b>
<b>N=</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>195</b>
Same	12	11	100	65	88	72	19	8	61	59	45	69
Different	88	89	0	35	12	28	81	92	39	41	55	31
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Notes: D: Deaf and S: Siblings; Division into seven occupation groups according to Jaspers & Stevens; same generation: age difference of maximum 15 years. In the column "residence" a comparison is made between place of birth of the research subject and residence of the witness at time of death/marriage.

The analysis of the unrelated marriage witnesses indicates that, among the marriage witnesses as well, a correspondence in occupations was rare, but occurred slightly more

often in the deaf cohort. In contrast to the death witnesses, the marriage witnesses were often of the same age generation as the spouses in both the deaf and the control group. Given that individuals usually married at an age that comprised a larger part of the population, this may not be significant. In the pre-industrial cohort, witnesses mostly lived in the same municipality as the research individuals were born in. Despite a growing divergence, this was still the case in the industrial sibling cohort. In contrast, in the industrial deaf cohort the ratio changed in favour of a different residence. This observation is in line with my previous finding that deaf men and women were more likely to marry a spouse from a different municipality and the assumption that the marriage witnesses of the deaf were mainly brought in by the deaf person's spouse. It may also be related to a higher migration rate of the deaf during childhood (*parental migration*).

**Table 6.18** Occupation types of the unrelated witnesses, in N and %

Death	Pre-industrial				Industrial			
	Deaf		Siblings		Deaf		Siblings	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Agriculture	1	11	1	25	1	1	3	5
Crafts	4	45	1	25	5	4	2	3
Administration	2	22	0	0	38	31	23	40
Trade and transport	0	0	1	25	2	2	3	5
Unskilled Labour	0	0	1	25	15	12	7	12
Services	2	22	0	0	38	31	15	26
Unemployed	0	0	0	0	21	17	5	9
Unknown	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0
<i>Total</i>	9	100	4	100	122	100	58	100
Marriage	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Agriculture	2	25	16	19	1	3	22	11
Crafts	2	25	20	24	10	32	62	32
Administration	2	25	29	34	8	26	57	29
Trade and transport	1	13	14	17	7	23	30	16
Unskilled Labour	1	12	3	3	3	10	18	9
Services	0	0	1	1	2	6	0	0
Unemployed	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2
Unknown	0	0	2	2	0	0	3	1
<i>Total</i>	8	100	85	100	31	100	195	100

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Characteristic of the unrelated witnesses is the large difference in occupation type. Analysing the most common occupations of the witnesses may provide more insight into how the research subjects came into contact with the witnesses. This is shown in table 6.18. The low number of death witnesses in the pre-industrial cohort means it is difficult

to sketch a reliable occupational profile for them. Nonetheless, a comparison of the first time cohort with the second one shows a distinct increase in the number of witnesses working in administration or services. The category administration comprises witnesses for which the following occupations were recorded: town clerk, friar, sexton, director of a hospital or institution, constable or police officer. After 1850, of the witnesses certifying the death of a deaf or hearing person, about 31 and 40 percent respectively exercised a public office. It can be assumed that these people were not personal friends of the deceased, but rather witnesses as part of their professional duty. Witnesses working in services were often specified as connected to a hospital or institution, and are therefore similarly unlikely to have been personally acquainted with the deceased. Based on the occupations of the death witnesses, we get the impression that in the course of the nineteenth century, both for deaf and hearing individuals, declaring a death became an official matter, reserved for civil servants. The increasing number of individuals dying in a hospital facility contributed to this increase.<sup>150</sup>

With regard to the other occupation types, the differences between the deaf and the siblings are limited, perhaps with the exception of the witnesses without employment, who were more numerous in the deaf cohort. If a person died before or after his economically active years, he and his peers were probably not working at time of death, which resulted in being recorded as without an occupation. A closer look at those deaf individuals with unemployed witnesses indeed confirms that both the deceased and the witnesses were registered as unemployed at the time of death. However, a comparison of both their ages shows that in more than half the cases the age gap was more than 20 years, thus making it unlikely that they were friends as teenagers or in old age. Then again, in some cases it does seem plausible that the deceased and the witnesses knew each other. Bernardus Sinay, born deaf in 1787 in Ghent, died in the Soeurs Hospitalières institution for the elderly in Ghent at the age of 75. His death was attested by two 78-year-old men who were residing in the same institution. The fact that they were of the same age and living in the same institution makes it likely that they were acquainted. Similarly, the death of the deaf Adolphe Cocquyt was attested by two men as old as Adolphe, who were also living in an institution of the Sisters of the Poor in Ghent.

The profile of the marriage witnesses is more varied and gives less evidence of a clear pattern. The shift in the number of farmers, craftsmen and unskilled labourers is consistent with general socio-economic changes in nineteenth-century Flanders. In the deaf population the highest increase is found in the trade and transport sector, with witnesses mainly working as shopkeepers and innkeepers. Although it is possible that the

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<sup>150</sup> The increase in hospitalization is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7 (7.2.1).



deaf were related to people exercising these professions, it seems more likely that these people acted as witnesses because they were local personalities and usually located in the town centre, nearby the town hall. Among the marriage witnesses, administrative occupations were also common, but not as much as among the death witnesses. In the case of marriage certificates, most of the witnesses exercising a public office were town clerks working at the town hall.

Based on the age and occupation characteristics of the witnesses, I conclude that most unrelated witnesses were probably not personal friends of the couple or the deceased. The sharp increase in public officers and servants acting as death witnesses shows that death became an official matter in the nineteenth century. The occupational profile of the marriage witnesses is more varied, with witnesses belonging to different occupational groups. However, the question remains to what extent this reflects a larger social network. Besides the higher number of unrelated witnesses in the deaf cohort, I found no notable differences in the hearing population.

### 6.3.1.3 Measuring the probability of having a related witness (analysis 2)

In the previous section I made a clear distinction between family, neighbours, acquaintances and unrelated witnesses, and examined the importance of each type of relationship in choosing witnesses. In this section, I analyse the choice of witness by means of binary logistic regression models, which allow one to test the significance of different independent variables such as gender, residential situation and age. *Binary* implies that I assume a dual outcome: individuals can have either no related witnesses or they can have at least one related witness at marriage/death.<sup>151</sup> The latter includes individuals with a family member or friend (neighbour/acquaintance) acting as a witness.

#### Variables of interest

The analysis starts with the variables *disability* and *time cohort*. Regarding the presence of a disability, I assume that a disability hindered one's ability to keep up a social network. The deaf in particular are an interesting group to study, as the results can tell us something about the necessity of communication in maintaining social relations. Next, I distinguish between two time cohorts to assess possible changes in the course of the nineteenth century. Cohort 1 consists of marriages and deaths dating before 1850 (pre-

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<sup>151</sup> Family-in-law is considered to be a related witness in the death certificate, but not in the marriage certificate as I assume that in marriage the family-in-law witnesses are presented by the spouses and are not chosen by the research individuals.

industrial period), cohort 2 of marriages and deaths taking place after 1850 (industrial period).<sup>152</sup> To confirm the hypothesis of a loosening of social ties among the deaf, results should point to a lower probability of having a related witness in the industrial period.

To account for the impact of other life characteristics, several covariates are taken into consideration.

- *Gender* – Analyses in the previous section have uncovered differences between men and women in the presence and choice for related witnesses. These differences between men and women are controlled for by taking into account gender as a covariate. Men are considered the reference group, as opposed to women.
- *Sibling alive* and *father alive* – The absence of living relatives reduces the chance of having a relative acting as a witness. For the majority of the research individuals information is available whether at least one sibling and the father were alive when he/she married or died. I assume that individuals with a living sibling and/or father (reference category) are more likely to have a related witness compared to individuals who do not have a living sibling and/or father.
- *Number of siblings* – The influence of the number of siblings is controlled for as we can assume that a person born in a family with many siblings had more relatives to fall back on than an only child. I distinguish between: (1) only children (reference category), (2) persons with 1 to 4 siblings and (3) persons with more than 4 siblings.
- *Civil status* – In the analysis of death witnesses, the impact of the presence of a spouse (and potentially children) is assessed by introducing the covariate *civil status*, with the assumption that married individuals were better socially embedded and had more relatives who could act as a witness than permanently single persons. Previously, table 6.14 confirmed a higher presence of family at death when a person was (or had been) married. Ever-married individuals constitute the reference group, compared to never-married individuals.
- *Place of marriage* – In the analysis of marriage witnesses, I test the impact of the place of marriage. It can be assumed that when a person married in his place of birth (reference category), the likelihood of having a related witness was higher than when he married in a different village, where he was a migrant. As the covariate does not take into account the timing of migration, results should be interpreted as tentative. When a person migrated as a child to the place of marriage, he may well have rebuilt his social network by the time of marriage.
- *Age at observation* – The age at observation can be expected to have an impact on the availability of friends and family members. Dying at an old age implies having peers

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<sup>152</sup> The distinction is made based on the date of the event, not the date of birth as people born in the same birth cohort can have very different ages at death and/or marriage.

of advanced age, which may have prevented them from being able to act as witnesses. Age at observation is introduced as a continuous variable.

- *Living environment* – The degree of isolation felt by deaf people may also have been affected by the size of the community in which they dwelt and the degree of geographical mobility they enjoyed. In urban settings opportunities to both meet other deaf people and develop literacy skills, enabling more profound communication, were more numerous.<sup>153</sup> On the other hand, rural communities may have provided more solidarity and been more inclusive of people with a disability. To include this factor *living environment* (urban/rural) is introduced as a covariate. The distinction into urban and rural areas is based on the places of marriage/death of the research individuals. People who married/died in a rural municipality are the reference category, as opposed to people who married/died in an urban municipality.
- *Residence* – *Residence* measures how an individual's residential situation affected their opportunities to keep in contact with friends and family. Living in with relatives is expected to favour the presence of relatives as a witness. Being institutionalized is assumed to have a negative effect on the likelihood of having friends and family as witnesses. Three categories of residence are introduced: living independently (reference category), living in or living in an institution at the time of observation.

The binary regression models represent the probability of having a related witness within the deaf population (model 1), the sibling population (model 2) and the total population (model 3) at death (table 6.19) and at marriage (table 6.20). Each model mentions 3 numbers. The odd ratio  $Exp(B)$ , shown in the first column, gives an indication of the probability of having a related witness.<sup>154</sup> The odd ratio of the reference group or category is 1. If the odd ratio of a given category is lower than 1, this indicates a lower chance of having a related witness compared to the reference group. A ratio higher than 1 points to a higher probability of having a related witness. The second column indicates whether the results are significant or not. *P-values* lower than 0.1 are considered moderately significant; those lower than 0.05 are significant and those lower than 0.01 are highly significant. The odd ratios with a significant p-value – thus, a significant effect on the chance of having a related witness – are in bold. In the third column, the relative frequencies of each category are shown. The *distribution* indicates the representation of each subcategory within the category as a whole (100 percent).

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<sup>153</sup> Cockayne, E. (2003) "Experiences of the Deaf in Early Modern England" *The Historical Journal*, 46/3, 493-510.

<sup>154</sup> Mayer, K.U. & Brandon, T.N. (eds.)(1990) *Event History Analysis in Life Course Research*. Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press.

## Results

In the analysis of the death witnesses (table 6.19), I have designed a separate model for the deaf (model 1) and the siblings (model 2) to assess the importance of covariates besides the presence of a disability. By incorporating both research cohorts in a joint model (model 3), the impact of a disability can be tested. All the explanatory covariates were individually included in the binary logistic regression models while controlling for the other covariates, but only five of them contributed significantly to the models' fit.

The models displayed no significant impact from the presence of a spouse on a person's likelihood of having a related death witness, nor did the presence of a living father or sibling, or the number of siblings. In both the deaf and hearing population, the odds ratios for these variables suggest that individuals who were or had been married were more likely to have a related witness. This is consistent with my previous findings (table 6.14). Similarly, it was more probable to have a related witness for persons who had a living father and for those with more than four siblings. With regard to gender, women seemed to have a higher propensity to have related witnesses at death. The odds ratios thus confirmed that individuals with a larger pool of available kin and women in particular had a higher probability of having a relative at their death, as was assumed. However, these variables had no explanatory significance for the model fit and were therefore not included in table 6.20.<sup>155</sup> Five variables did prove to have a significant effect on the likelihood of having a related death witness in the deaf, sibling or in both cohorts: cohort, living environment, residence, age and disability.

Models 1 and 2 show that the odd ratios in both the deaf and sibling cohort were lower in the industrial cohort. The lower odd ratios indicate that the probability of having a related witness declined in the second half of the nineteenth century. However, an examination of the p-values shows that the decline was only significant in the deaf cohort. This is consistent with my previous observation that the deaf in particular experienced an increase in unrelated witnesses at death. The probability of having a related witness at death was also significantly affected by a person's *living environment*. In both the deaf and sibling model, a person was less likely to have a related witness when they died in an urban setting. In the deaf cohort in particular, people living in towns were 95 percent less likely to have a related death witness. Siblings living in an urban area were 75 percent less likely to have a relative as a witness. This may point to a generally

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<sup>155</sup> Previously, I stated that as a population size becomes smaller, the risk of the p-values turning out to be insignificant is much higher. Thus the small population size may account for the insignificance of some covariates. The insignificance of the results should not be interpreted as the variables having no importance, but as an indication that research on a larger sample is necessary to be certain. To avoid the sample size being divided over too many covariates (and thus turning the sample size into even smaller groups) I nonetheless excluded covariates with insignificant p-values.

higher level of isolation in an urban environment, but it may also merely reflect an increasingly official approach to registering death, which began earlier in urbanized regions. It could also be related to the fact that institutions were almost exclusively situated in cities. Indeed, the covariate *residence* shows that in all models living in an institution had a significantly negative effect on the propensity to have related witnesses. As table 6.19 shows, living in an institution at the time of death resulted in an almost irrefutable absence of related witnesses, in both the sibling and the deaf cohort. The likelihood of having a related witness was slightly higher in the sibling cohort as living in an institution reduced their chances by 'only' 90 percent, compared to 98 percent for the deaf cohort. Whether this implies that people living in an institution had lost all contact with friends and family is difficult to say. The over-representation of unrelated witnesses was probably largely the result of the practice of institutions to send servants to the local government offices, rather than a reflection of the solitary life the institutionalized men and women lived. Living in the household of others contributed to the social network of siblings (a 3.5 higher chance of having a related witness), while the positive effect was negligible in the deaf cohort. Nonetheless, in both models the results were insignificant. A final variable, which was significant in the sibling model but not in the deaf model, is *age*. An odds ratio for age higher than 1 indicates that as a sibling grew older, their chances of having a related witness increased, at a rate of about 3 percent each year. This is surprising, as I had assumed the opposite.

The results in the total population (model 3) are in line with the results in the separate models. The odds of having a related witness for the general research population declined in the industrial cohort and in an urban and institutional environment. A comparison alongside the covariate *disability* confirms that deaf individuals had a significantly lower probability to have a related witness present at their death: the siblings were about 63 percent more likely to have a family member, neighbour or acquaintance as a witness.

**Table 6.19** Binary logistic regression of the probability of having a related witness at death

	Model 1 Deaf		Model 2 Siblings		Model 3 All				
	Exp(B)	p-value	Distribution (%)	Exp(B)	p-value	Distribution (%)	Exp(B)	p-value	Distribution (%)
<i>Disability</i>									
Hearing (ref.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	48.4
Deaf	-	-	100	-	-	-	<b>0.371</b>	0.021	51.6
<i>Time cohort</i>									
Before 1850 (ref.)	1	-	29.3	1	-	23.2	1	-	27.1
After 1850	<b>0.050</b>	0.017	70.1	0.000*	0.997	76.8	<b>0.067</b>	0.017	72.9
<i>Living environment</i>									
Rural (ref.)	1	-	66.2	1	-	74.2	1	-	70.1
Urban	<b>0.055</b>	0.000	33.8	<b>0.253</b>	0.043	25.8	<b>0.119</b>	0.000	29.9
<i>Residence</i>									
Independent (ref.)	1	-	26.8	1	-	61.3	1	-	43.5
Living in	1.009	0.994	38.9	3.463	0.358	22.6	1.951	0.393	31
Institutionalized	<b>0.026</b>	0.000	34.3	<b>0.106</b>	0.002	16.1	<b>0.065</b>	0.000	25.5
<i>Age</i>									
	0.998	0.902	-	<b>1.030</b>	0.091	-	1.014	0.211	-
	N individuals: 198 N related witness: 150 Chi-square: 130.948 p < .000		N individuals: 186 N related witness: 170 Chi-square: 37.907 p < .000		N individuals: 384 N related witness: 320 Chi-square: 180.168 p < .000				

\*The hazard ratio of 0.000 in the sibling cohort can be explained by the fact that in the pre-industrial period (died before 1850) all siblings had a related witness.

Performing the same analysis for the marriage witnesses proved impossible due to the small number of deaf marriages with complete longitudinal data (N=29). Subdividing the total population of married research individuals according to disability would have resulted in categories too small to obtain significant results. The analysis in model 1 is therefore based on the total married population, with N=167 (table 6.20). As in the model for the death witnesses, I tested the significance of the impact of the above-mentioned covariates on the propensity to have a related witness at marriage. The covariate *civil status* was replaced by *place of marriage*. Model 2 tests the impact of interaction variables. I interact *disability* with subsequently *time cohort* and *living environment*. The interaction model controls for all covariates, but only the interaction variables are reported in the table.

I found no distinct pattern in the relationship between having a related witness and having a living father and siblings, the number of siblings, the place of marriage or gender. These covariates proved insignificant and were excluded from the model. Nonetheless, the odd ratios suggested that individuals who married in a village different from their birth place had less chance to have a related witness. On a similar account, chances were smaller for women and individuals living on their own, compared to men and those living in.<sup>156</sup> The gender bias towards women is in line with the previous observation that more women had no relatives present at their wedding (figure 6.9).

However, disability, time cohort, region and age proved to be important. Model 1 shows the deaf had almost a three times higher chance of having a related witness at marriage. This observation is consistent with my previous findings based on the cross tabulations. In the course of the nineteenth century, there was a development towards a lower propensity to have a related witness. Individuals married after 1850 were 70 percent less likely to have a related witness. However, a combination of the variables *disability* and *time cohort* (interaction model) shows that this decline was only significant in the sibling cohort. The effect of an urban life differed according to research population. Based on model 1, generally it appears that in contrast to the death analysis, individuals living in the city were much more likely to have a related marriage witnesses compared to those living in the countryside. However, the combination of *disability* with *living environment* shows this observation only applies to the siblings. In the deaf cohort, differences between the countryside and the city were limited and slightly in favour of rural residents. As the research individuals grew older, their chances of having a related marriage witness decreased with 6 percent each year. Despite the assumption that deaf individuals were at a disadvantage when it came to developing and maintaining social

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<sup>156</sup> None of the subjects was institutionalized at the time of marriage so only the distinction between those living in and those living independently was made. However, for a large number of individuals, the residential situation at the time of marriage was unknown.

contact, the marriage analysis shows no negative impact of being deaf on having related witnesses. On the contrary, being deaf seems to have benefitted one's chances. However, given that only a small minority of deaf individuals got married, caution is required in translating these results to the deaf in general.

**Table 6.20** Binary logistic regression of the probability of having a related witness at marriage

	Model 1 All			Model 2 Interaction		
	Exp(B)	p-value	Distribution (%)	Exp(B)	p-value	Distribution (%)
<i>Disability</i>						
Hearing (ref.)	1	-	82.6			
Deaf	<b>2.950</b>	0.038	17.4			
<i>Time cohort</i>						
Before 1850 (ref.)	1	-	38.9			
After 1850	<b>0.308</b>	0.001	61.1			
<i>Living environment</i>						
Rural (ref.)	1	-	58.1			
Urban	<b>2.975</b>	0.003	41.9			
<i>Age</i>	<b>0.941</b>	0.004	-	<b>0.940</b>	.004	-
<i>Disability*Time cohort</i>						
Before 1850, hearing (ref.)				1	-	32.9
Before 1850, deaf				2.594	0.274	6
After 1850, hearing				<b>0.301</b>	0.002	49.7
After 1850, deaf				0.943	0.929	11.4
<i>Disability*Living environment</i>						
Rural hearing (ref.)				1	-	51.5
Rural deaf				<b>6.624</b>	0.021	6.6
Urban hearing				<b>3.693</b>	0.001	31.1
Urban deaf				<b>6.168</b>	0.004	10.8
	N individuals: 167 N related witness: 91 Chi-square: 32.298 p < .000			N individuals: 167 N related witness: 91 Chi-square: 10.680 p < .014		

Based on the binary logistic regression, I conclude that three variables in particular influenced a person's probability of having a related marriage or death witness. An individual's chances changed significantly in the second half of the nineteenth century (time cohort) and were substantially influenced by living environment (urban/rural) and institutionalization (residence). Being deaf negatively influenced the odds of having a re-



lated witness present at death, but was favourable for having a related witness at marriage.

#### 6.3.1.4 Summary

The criticism can be raised that the study of witnesses only covers a small part of a person's social network, at exclusive events in a person's life. However, in the absence of personal testimonies of social experiences, demographic sources are invaluable for catching a glimpse of the social relationships of people. The fact that witnesses were either chosen at marriage or closely involved in the death of a person, and that marriage and death certificates are available for all the population groups, make witnesses a good proxy for studying processes of (changing) family relations, friendships and community life.

With regard to processes of family relations, this section has uncovered a dual trend in death and in marriage. Analyses have shown that it became less common for deaf men and women to have a related witness at death. In the second half of the nineteenth century the number of family witnesses dropped with more than 16 percent compared to the period before. In the sibling cohort, on the other hand, family remained equally important. However, crosstabulations and binary logistic regression models uncovered differences within the deaf and sibling cohorts according to different factors. It became apparent that it was more common for women to have a family witness at death compared to men. The same was true for ever-married individuals and persons who died in the countryside or in the household of others. Permanently singles, people living in an urban setting and/or in an institution had the lowest chances of having a related witness. The observation that more deaf men and women were never-married (Chapter 5) and institutionalized (Chapter 7) may explain why they had less family witnesses. While the representation of family witnesses declined, the variety in family witnesses did not. On the contrary, in the industrial period more different types of relatives acted as witnesses. Moreover, except for a lower availability of husbands and sons, deaf individuals had similar family members acting as witnesses. Most related death witnesses appear to have been relatives with whom the deceased was living in the same household at the time of death, but not exclusively. The presence of cousins and not co-habiting nephews as witnesses suggests that individuals kept contact with relatives beyond the borders of their household. In both the deaf and sibling cohorts, vertical relatives became more important death witnesses in the course of the nineteenth century.

The analysis of the marriage witnesses pointed in a different direction. In contrast to the death analysis, the marriage analysis showed that being deaf had no negative effect on a person's chances of having a related witness. On the contrary, being deaf seems to have benefitted one's chances as the binary logistic regression showed that deaf indi-

viduals were almost three times as likely to have a related witness compared to the siblings. In the second half of the nineteenth century the advantage of deaf individuals over siblings even increased as chances to have a related witness significantly declined in the sibling cohort. The differences between deaf and hearing individuals and between men and women in the choice for certain relatives were negligible. Nonetheless, a comparison between the deaf and sibling cohorts showed that the variety in witnesses was smaller in the deaf marriages. Deaf individuals had more family-in-law witnesses, which may indicate they had less own relatives to turn to and were more dependent on the witnesses presented by their spouses.

The study of family witnesses enables to reconstruct patterns of familial sociability. Similarly, through the analysis of the representation of neighbours and acquaintances among the witnesses, we can deduce the extent of participation within a broader community. Both in the deaf and sibling cohorts, neighbours and acquaintances mostly lost their importance as witnesses in the course of the nineteenth century, indicating a general loss of solidarity and increasing individualization. The distinction according to civil status showed that the married deaf and married siblings had comparable percentages of neighbouring and acquainted witnesses. However, the comparison between the deaf and hearing singles indicated a higher number of neighbouring and acquainted witnesses in the death certificates of hearing singles. These observations suggest that the minority of married deaf individuals was able to participate in community life in a similar way to the married hearing population. Deaf singles, on the other hand, were less able to make contacts within their community, in comparison to the hearing singles. The fact that more deaf singles lived in an institution, compared to hearing singles who more often lived on their own or with non-kin, undoubtedly compromised the chances for deaf persons to engage in community life.

Finally, I aimed to shed light on the friendship relations of the research population. To this end, I focussed on the unrelated witnesses in the marriage and death certificates. To investigate the possibility that unrelated witnesses were acquainted to the research persons, I studied the similarities in occupation type, generation and residence between the married/deceased person and the unrelated witnesses. Based on the general absence of similarities, I concluded that most unrelated witnesses were probably no personal friends of the deaf or hearing persons.

The analysis of the accordance with age, occupation and residence with unrelated witnesses gives an indication of the likelihood that witnesses were acquainted with the couple or the deceased, but it can never capture the many dimensions of friendship. In the case of deaf friendships, this is presumably even more problematic. The particular 'anti-social' character of deafness, as an impairment which kept deaf men and women from conversing easily with the non-deaf, may have resulted in an inclination of deaf people to predominantly make friends with other deaf people. However, the inability of

these friends to speak made deaf people unlikely witnesses. As such, demographic sources may give the false impression that deaf men and women had limited social ties beyond family relationships. Next, I turn to more qualitative sources in the hope they can shed more light on the social networks of deaf men and women. More specifically, I wish to uncover some of the ways in which deaf persons could come into contact with other deaf people. One of the sources testifying of an increased sense of community and contact between deaf individuals from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, are newspaper articles. In Chapter 2, I described how I collected over a 1000 articles from 41 newspapers, spanning the whole of Belgium and all political and ideological factions (2.2.2.2). These articles constitute the starting point in the next section.

### **6.3.2 Social life and leisure**

Finally in this chapter, I look at the opportunities for deaf men and women to engage in social activities and encounter other deaf individuals (outside deaf schools). At the basis of this analysis are newspaper articles, published at the end of the nineteenth and first decades of the twentieth century, reporting on deaf clubs, sporting events, celebrations and so on. As these articles are difficult to connect to the research population, the focus is on a more general Belgian deaf population. The newspaper articles sketch a picture of the possibilities for deaf people to come into contact with one another, but do not provide information about the extent to which deaf people were actually engaged in deaf clubs and activities. None of the newspaper articles mentioned the number of members or participants at a certain event; only occasionally a name was mentioned – almost exclusively of committee members. So other sources are required to gain insight into the number and social background of the deaf individuals who were members of a deaf organization. A future analysis of the by-laws and membership lists of the deaf clubs – depending on the diligence with which these records were preserved, can be found and are accessible – may allow a more accurate assessment of the importance of deaf clubs for deaf men and women. Despite the limitations inherent in the information in the newspaper articles, they provide a unique perspective on the development of the Belgian deaf community and expansion of deaf club life.

### 6.3.2.1 The development of the Belgian deaf community

*“One is never deaf alone. There must be at least two before one can start to talk about deafness. Deafness is a relationship. It is an experience that can only be shared.”*<sup>157</sup>

“Prior to the formation of schools for the deaf,” according to anthropologist Russel S. Rosen, “deaf people lived under largely solitary conditions.”<sup>158</sup> Only after the formation of deaf schools did they become a community with their own language, organization and cultural traditions. The establishment of deaf schools has been considered an important prerequisite for the development of deaf communities in Western Europe and North America in the second half of the nineteenth century. As such, the development of deaf schools had an ironic outcome, according to historian Susan Burch. Instead of integrating deaf people into hearing society, which was the main goal of the deaf residential schools, they enabled the advent of a strong deaf culture.<sup>159</sup>

In addition to the deaf schools, scholars have pointed to other important preconditions. According to Margaret Winzer, in her study into the deaf community of Toronto (Canada), the formation of a deaf community took place within a context of education and urbanization: “Trained for the factory and tempted toward urban areas, deaf adults set about establishing their own unique and separate community.” Both internal and external factors, such as a shared language, institutionalization, shared school experiences, the availability of marriage partners, the negative societal attitudes and occupational categorization, led deaf people to perceive themselves as “a distinct class” and encouraged the development of their own social network.<sup>160</sup> Susan Foster related the development of a deaf community to deaf people’s experiences of social rejection by and alienation from the larger hearing society and of participation and meaningful interaction with

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<sup>157</sup> (translated quote) Mottez, B. (1987) “Expérience et usage du corps chez les sourds et ceux qui les fréquentent” In: Alby, J.M. & Samsoy, P. (eds.) *Handicap vécu, évalué*. Grenoble: La Pensée Sauvage, 107. The relationship between deaf schools and the formation of a deaf community in the Netherlands is also a focal point in: Tijsseling, C. (2014) ‘School, waar?’ *Een onderzoek naar de betekenis van het Nederlandse dovenonderwijs voor de Nederlandse dovensamenleving, 1790-1900*. Utrecht: Utrecht University (unpublished PhD dissertation).

<sup>158</sup> Rosen, R.S. (2008) “Descriptions of the American Deaf Community, 1830-2000: Epistemic Foundations” *Disability & Society*, 23/2, 129.

<sup>159</sup> Burch, S. (2002) *Signs of Resistance. American Deaf Cultural History, 1900 to World War II*. New York/London: New York University Press, 10.

<sup>160</sup> Winzer, M. (1993) “Education, Urbanization and the Deaf Community: A Case Study of Toronto, 1870-1900” In: Van Cleve, J.V. (ed.) *Deaf History Unveiled: Interpretations from the New Scholarship*. Washington: Gallaudet university press, 130-1.

other deaf people.<sup>161</sup> Similarly, Paul Higgins associated the deaf community with experiences of unity and a sense of identity, complemented with shared experiences of “*frustration in making themselves understood, embarrassing misunderstandings, and the loneliness of being left out by family, neighborhood acquaintances and others.*”<sup>162</sup>

The development of deaf communities has attracted the attention of several scholars, who have interpreted it from among others a medical perspective – the deaf are a group united by hearing and speech difficulties, a disability perspective – they are united by their exclusion from participation in society, and a cultural perspective – they are united by the use of sign language.<sup>163</sup> But, while almost all scholars acknowledge the role of shared experiences in the development of the deaf community, few have studied these actual experiences and even fewer have studied them from a cumulative, or life cycle perspective.<sup>164</sup> Moreover, most studies tend to look at the deaf community from an international and/or national perspective, ignoring the activities at a local level and the direct implications for ordinary deaf men and women. The history of the Belgian deaf community has, except for the studies of Liesje Raemdonck and Ingeborg Scheiris, Maurice Buyens and Pieter Verstraete, hardly received any attention.<sup>165</sup>

Although newspaper articles alone cannot provide information for a comprehensive overview of the history and character of the Belgian deaf community, they can give a glimpse into the objectives and organization of deaf clubs. Deaf clubs only represent what we might call an ‘outward expression’ of a more all-encompassing deaf community of people “*who share a common language, common experiences and values, and a common way of interacting with each other, and with hearing people*”.<sup>166</sup> In addition to the more formal clubs and political organizations, deaf communities were created through different

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<sup>161</sup> Foster, S. (1989) “Social Alienation and Peer Identification: A study of the Social Construction of Deafness” *Human Organization*, 48/3, 226-35. However, Foster emphasizes that her dialectical model of alienation and identification cannot explain the experiences of all deaf people: some deaf people who experience alienation from the hearing world do not seek membership in the deaf community, while others maintain good relations within both hearing and deaf communities.

<sup>162</sup> Higgins, P.C. (1980) *Outsiders in a Hearing World*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 38.

<sup>163</sup> Rosen, R.S. (2008) “Descriptions of the American Deaf Community”, 129.

<sup>164</sup> Foster, S. (1989) “Social Alienation and Peer Identification”.

<sup>165</sup> Raemdonck, L. & Scheiris, I. (2007) *Ongehoord verleden. Dove frontvorming in België aan het begin van de 20ste eeuw*. Ghent: Fevlado-diversus vzw; Buyens, M. (2007) *De dove persoon, zijn federatie en belangenverdediging*. Antwerp: Garant; Buyens, M. (2010) *De dove persoon... zijn verenigingsleven*. Antwerp: Garant ; Verstraete, P. (2012) “Naar een fluïde benadering van dovencultuur en dovengeschiedenis: Enkele reflecties over de rol van sportorganisaties voor doven in het ontstaan van een dovencultuur in België” *Volkskunde*, 113/2, 152-69.

<sup>166</sup> Baker, C. & Padden, C. (1974) “Focusing on the Non-Manual Components of American Sign Language” In: Siple, P. (ed.) *Understanding Language through Sign Language Research*. New York: Academic Press, 4.

kinds of interactions, including friendships, marriages, and informal acquaintances.<sup>167</sup> Evidence for these more informal features of deaf community life is more difficult to find. Nonetheless, deaf clubs were an essential part of the community life of deaf people. Unable to access mainstream cultural activities because of communication barriers, deaf associations remedied their members' feelings of isolation and marginalization.<sup>168</sup> They acted as forums for interaction, for social activities, for activism and for communication in a shared language. Consequently, Kyle described deaf associations as “*the very heart of the village of deaf people*”.<sup>169</sup> Burch referred to them as the “*extended family*” for deaf people.<sup>170</sup>

As in other countries, the establishment of deaf schools in early nineteenth-century Belgium was an indispensable requirement for the development of deaf organizations. On the one hand, they brought deaf individuals into contact with one another and taught the pupils a shared language, and on the other the deaf schools actively supported the formation of deaf organizations. Not coincidentally, the first deaf associations in Belgium were established in the 1860s and 1870s in Ghent, Liège and Brussels – important centres for deaf education with a large deaf population. *De Maatschappij der Doof-stommen de Abt de l'Épée* (The Society of Deaf-mutes the Abbé de l'Épée) in Ghent was probably the first deaf organization in Belgium, established around 1860.<sup>171</sup> Brother of Charity Bonaventura (1818-1888) from the school for deaf boys in Ghent played a role in its foundation. In the period between 1860 and May 1901, nine more deaf associations were formed in Belgian cities. In May 26, 1901 these ten associations joined together to form a Belgian federation. The members of the federation made it their aim to organize regular congresses, promote the interests of the deaf, support deaf initiatives and publish a deaf journal. However, the national union died a quick death due to internal conflicts within its committee. In the same period, the language question between the Flemish and Walloon deaf led to the creation in October 1906 of a *Vlaamse Doofstommen Beweging* (Flemish Deaf-mute Movement) as a reaction to the predominantly French character of the national deaf congresses. However, all traces of this movement disap-

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<sup>167</sup> Higgins, P.C. (1980) *Outsiders in a Hearing World*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

<sup>168</sup> Burch, S. (2002) *Signs of Resistance*, 71.

<sup>169</sup> Kyle, J. (1990) “The Deaf Community: Culture, Custom and Tradition” In: Prillwitz, S. & Wollhaber T. (eds.) *Sign Language Research and Application*. Hamburg: Signum Press, 175-187; Bellés, R. et al. (2000) “The Education of Deaf Children in Barcelona” In: Metzger, M. (ed.) *Bilingualism & Identity in Deaf Communities*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 100.

<sup>170</sup> Burch, S. (2002) *Signs of Resistance*, 72.

<sup>171</sup> Buyens, M. (2007) *De dove persoon, zijn federatie en belangenverdediging*, 21-3. The founding date of the deaf society in Ghent is situated by Buyens around 1860 as no earlier traces of the society were found in historical sources. The question as to which deaf club was the first in Belgium is not uncontested as the deaf society of Liège (*Les Sourds Muets de Liège*), founded in 1864, has similar claims to be the first Belgian deaf society.

peared in the 1910s. Attempts to set up a national association were not successful until 1936, when the umbrella organization of the *Nationaal Verbond der Katholieke Doofstommen* or *Navekados* (National Union of Catholic Deaf Organizations) was established. This association remained in existence until 1981.<sup>172</sup> In the first half of the twentieth century many more local deaf clubs saw the light of day.

### 6.3.2.2 Social life in Belgian deaf clubs

The newspaper articles demonstrate that deaf associations engaged their members in various ways. A first important function was the organization of social gatherings. According to sociologist Bernard Mottez “*social events are integral to deaf communities*”.<sup>173</sup> Social events provided an opportunity for people to converse, to unwind and to develop a sense of cohesion.<sup>174</sup> Several articles were intended to inform the members of the deaf clubs of general meetings and excursions. For example, on May 29, 1919 the society of deaf-mutes in Antwerp put a notice in the *Gazet van Antwerpen* inviting its members to take part in a visit to the paper factory in Willebroek on July 1.<sup>175</sup> The society planned to take the train from Antwerp to Boom, from where they would walk to the factory alongside the canal guided by their “friends from Boom”. Presumably, the expression “our friends from Boom” refers to deaf club members living in Boom. The use of the term ‘friends’ suggests that the deaf club was considered an important outlet for making friends and expressing a feeling of solidarity. The newspaper articles also show that deaf clubs had general meetings on a regular basis, although they do not reveal whether these gatherings had a formal or informal character, or what was discussed. They do, however, point to the important connection of deaf clubs with deaf schools as many clubs held their meetings in the local deaf school (figure 6.10).

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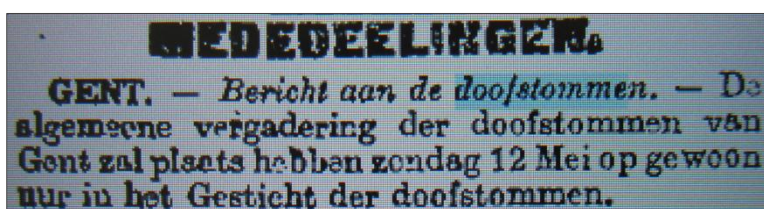
<sup>172</sup> An elaborate discussion of the attempts to establish a national deaf society can be found in: Buyens, M. (2007) *De dove persoon, zijn federatie en belangenverdediging*, 19-30; Raemdonk, L. & Scheiris, I. (2007) *Ongehoord verleden*, 81-128.

<sup>173</sup> Mottez, B. (1993) “The Deaf-Mute Banquets and the Birth of the Deaf Movement” In: Van Cleve, J.V. (ed.) *Deaf History Unveiled: Interpretations from the New Scholarship*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 27.

<sup>174</sup> Covey, H.C. (1998) *Social Perceptions of People with Disabilities in History*. Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 198.

<sup>175</sup> “Maatschappij der doofstommen” in *Gazet van Antwerpen*, December 11, 1919.

Figure 6.10 Article published in *Het Volk*, May 7, 1918<sup>176</sup>



Besides meetings and excursions, the clubs also organized celebrations and parties. On July 16, 1909 the deaf club of Ostend announced it was throwing a “party for friends” on August 1 for all deaf-mutes in Belgium and France.<sup>177</sup> Again, the connection between deaf people is stressed by describing the gathering as a “party for friends”. An important reason for organizing festivities was the celebration of a club’s jubilee. In 1923 a deaf club in Ghent celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The day before the celebrations, the *Vooruit* announced the activities that were to take place: the members of the club and its guests from all parts of Belgium would assemble at the station to walk in a parade to the city hall, where the mayor would welcome them.<sup>178</sup> The day after the celebrations, the newspaper reported on the festivities, stating that many deaf representatives from clubs in Brussels, Antwerp, Sint-Niklaas, Liège, Hoesel and Aalst had come to Ghent to attend the parade. Apparently the deaf club had also taken advantage of their meeting with the mayor to express their wish to the city council to grant them a gathering place “where the deaf-mutes could meet each other freely”.<sup>179</sup> The latter shows that advocacy of deaf interests was also an important aim of deaf clubs. The terminology used (‘friends’), the mutual attendance of each others’ activities and the public parades signify the desire of the deaf clubs to present themselves as a distinct group to society and develop a sense of community and identity among the deaf.

This objective was also the basis of the banquets the deaf clubs organized, usually in honour of Abbé de l’Épée, the founder of the first deaf school in Paris. Initially these banquets were organized in rotation by the cities of Brussels, Antwerp, Bruges, Liège and Ghent, but by the end of the century several cities were organizing their own annual banquets.<sup>180</sup> Newspapers reported on these banquets, at which toasts were drunk in memory of Abbé de l’Épée, while a laurel wreath was placed on his bust.<sup>181</sup> For similar

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<sup>176</sup> Translation: Announcements. Ghent – Message for deaf-mutes. – The general meeting of the deaf-mutes of Ghent will take place on Sunday May 12 at the usual hour in the institute for deaf-mutes.

<sup>177</sup> “Oostende” in *Het Nieuws Van Den Dag*, July 16, 1909.

<sup>178</sup> “Feest der doofstommen” in *Vooruit*, August 11, 1923.

<sup>179</sup> “Stadsnieuws – bij de doofstommen” in *Vooruit*, August 13, 1923.

<sup>180</sup> Raemdonk, L. & Scheiris, I. (2007) *Ongehoord verleden*, 55-8.

<sup>181</sup> E.g. “Banquet des sourds-muets” in *Le Courier de l’Escaut*, November 27, 1864. “Binneland” in *Vooruit*, December 2, 1884.



purposes several deaf clubs had a banner made which functioned as the front piece of the club during events. In August 1897, the deaf club of Ghent inaugurated his banner, which is shown in figure 6.11. According to an article in *Het Laatste Nieuws*, the banner was picked up at the house of the chairman Edmond Bressous, from where it was taken to the club's meeting place in the company of representatives from deaf clubs from other cities.<sup>182</sup> Is the Edmond Bressous to which the article refers perhaps the research individual Edmond Francois Bressous, born in Ghent in 1853? The population register of Ghent indicates that Edmond Bressous was living in Zwijnaardsesteenweg (Ghent) in 1897, together with his second wife, two of his children, and the unrelated 70-year-old Paul Martin, all deaf-mute. In the publication of Buyens, we find that Paul Martin was the first chairman of the deaf society in Ghent.<sup>183</sup> As such, we can be quite certain that my research individual and the chairman in the article were one and the same. Perhaps he is also the person holding the flag in the picture.

**Figure 6.11** The flag of the Deaf society of Ghent, s.d.



Source: Raemdonck L. & Scheiris I. *Ongehoord verleden*, 51.

<sup>182</sup> "Inhuldiging van een vaandel" in *Het Laatste Nieuws*, August 22, 1897.

<sup>183</sup> Buyens, M. (2007) *De Dove persoon, zijn federatie en belangenverdediging*, 21-2 & 290-1.

Another objective of the deaf associations, similar to other hearing societies, was to (financially) support their members. In Chapter 4, I illustrated that many associations set up mutual health insurance for their members. The name of a deaf association in Aalst, mentioned in a newspaper article in *Het Volk* in 1924, even suggests that specific associations were established to help deaf members save up money: on February 3, 1924 *De Spaarmaatschappij der Katholieke Doofstommen van Aalst* (The Savings Society of the Catholic Deaf-mutes of Aalst) organized its annual party together with representatives from Ghent and other cities. In his speech, according to the newspaper report, the chairman urged the members to “work for the advancement and elevation of their class”.<sup>184</sup>

The associations also put knowledge transfer and social debates high on their agendas. They organized lectures and congresses addressing political, religious and societal issues. An article in *Het Volk* (April 25, 1924) describes how the annual gathering of the *Stedelijke Doofstommenbond* (urban deaf-mutes alliance) was graced by three lectures. One was by the religious administrator who gave “spiritual instruction”, one by the president about “the deaf-mutes among family and in society” and one by the presidents of the deaf clubs of Ghent and Brussels about Abbé de l’Épée, all in sign language.<sup>185</sup> Similarly, an article in the monthly deaf journal *Onze Vriend* (1941) illustrates the importance attached to ‘lifelong learning’ within deaf clubs. According to the author:

*“Horende mensen weten veel. Velen zijn lid van een of andere vereniging. Ze gaan naar lezingen, concerten, volgen cursussen, luisteren naar de radio; daardoor ontwikkelen ze zich hoe langer hoe meer. Maar wij doven, wij horen niets. Wij weten weinig. Nog erger wordt dat, doordat velen nooit lezen. Dus zijn wij geestelijk arm.[...] Vooral moeten wij veel leren, nu wij niet meer naar school gaan. Wij moeten leren nadenken over alles wat rondom ons gebeurt op politiek, geestelijk en maatschappelijk gebied.”*<sup>186</sup>

Deaf activism was another aspect of many clubs, especially in the light of late nineteenth-century developments. At the end of the nineteenth century, several congresses were organized on a national and international level. Their major point of discussion

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<sup>184</sup> “Uit Aalst” in *Het Volk*, February 7, 1924.

<sup>185</sup> “Kortrijk – Bij de doofstommen” in *Het Volk*, April 25, 1924.

<sup>186</sup> Anonymous (1948) “Het verenigingsleven nodig voor doven?” *Onze Vriend*, 24. The journal *Onze Vriend* was published for the first time in 1925 by the Brothers of Charity in Ghent under the name *Ons Blad* (Our Journal). In 1938, the journal assumed a new title, *Onze Vriend* (Our Friend). Today, the journal is still published, entitled *Fevlado*. Translation: Hearing people know many things. Many of them are members of a club. They go to lectures, concerts, take courses, listen to the radio; as a result, they keep developing their mental capacities. We, deaf people, know little. This becomes even worse, because many deaf people never read. Therefore, we are intellectually poor. If we never want to talk or learn at a meeting, we are getting even poorer. [...] Above all, we need to learn, now we do not attend school anymore. We need to learn to think about the things that happen around us, in politics, religion and society.

was the way in which deaf education needed to be organized. More specifically, the debates dealt with the question of whether deaf individuals needed to be educated through sign language (manualism) or through speech and lip-reading (oralism). In the last decades of the nineteenth century, normalization beliefs within deaf education hardened, meaning that instead of ‘merely’ focusing on a vocational training in combination with religion through sign language, hearing educators started to stress the importance of deaf pupils being able to speak and lip-read for successful integration in society. This shift from manualism to oralism was part of a general European and American trend and focused on the ambition to make the deaf “as hearing as possible”. Sign language was increasingly seen as primitive and barbaric, and not suited to a civilized society. On the initiative of educationalists three major conferences were organized: Paris (1878), Milan (1880) and Brussels (1883), dealing with issues regarding education and employment of deaf individuals. Although the deaf were at the centre of discussion, they themselves had little say in matters. According to Raemdonck and Scheiris, only about 21 of the 230 participants at the 1883 congress were deaf themselves.<sup>187</sup> These developments were perceived by the deaf as a threat to their community and identity, which was to an important extent based on the use of sign language. The deaf clubs put up active resistance to the oral developments. Not only did they encourage deaf people to keep using sign language in daily life, but they also sent representatives to international conferences to defend sign language and organized their own (inter)national congresses.<sup>188</sup> Thus deaf clubs were also involved in protest movements and advocacy of deaf rights. In addition to congresses, newspapers mention the organization of demonstrations. In October 1922 a demonstration was held by people who were disabled by accident or from birth, including deaf-mutes. The people with disabilities taking part wanted to call attention to their “unfortunate living conditions”.<sup>189</sup>

Apart from these more general deaf associations, the newspaper articles mention more specific deaf clubs as well. Two newspapers report on the activities of a scouting movement for deaf-mute boys, founded around 1920 by the Brothers of Charity at their institution in Sint-Lambrechts-Woluwe. Like the hearing boy scouts they would “follow courses by the Red Cross, construct bridges, fight fires, do gymnastics, flag signing, etc.”<sup>190</sup> Another type of organization, mentioned in *Het Laatste Nieuws*, was a drama society. In March 1889 it organized a play, directed and played by men and women who

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<sup>187</sup> Raemdonck, L. & Scheiris, I. (2007) *Ongehoord verleden*, 68-76.

<sup>188</sup> De Clerck, G.A.M. (2011) “Het emancipatieproces van de Vlaamse dovengemeenschap: identiteitsdynamieken vanuit een transnationaal perspectief en een vraag naar de erkenning van dove kennis- en leervormen” *Ethiek & Maatschappij*, 13/4, 99-120.

<sup>189</sup> “Invalidedenbetooging” in *Het Volk*, September 8, 1922.

<sup>190</sup> “La fête des Boys-Scouts” in *La Libre Belgique*, June 28, 1920.

were all deaf-mute. The dialogues were conducted in sign language, which indicates that the performance was primarily intended for a deaf audience.<sup>191</sup> Finally, from the 1910s onward several newspapers mention deaf sporting teams and events. Important in this regard is the establishment in 1922 of *Het Sportverbond der Doofstommen van België* (The Sports League of Deaf-mutes in Belgium) – also called the *Union Sportive Silencieuse* (Silent Sports League).<sup>192</sup> From that time on, national competitions for deaf athletes and teams were organized in various disciplines. Several articles report the results of football matches between Belgian deaf teams. On April 18, 1925 *Het Volk* reported on the victory of “Silent Ghent” over the Brussels deaf football team, so securing the championship title of Belgium.<sup>193</sup> Moreover, international competitions were organized as well. In August 1924 the first Olympic Games for the deaf were organized in Paris, consisting of competitions in athletics, swimming, cycling, shooting and football. An article in the *Vooruit* in February of that year announced that so far France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Finland had signed up, but it was expected that the US, Britain, Denmark, Sweden and Norway would enter as well.<sup>194</sup> Although most of the articles indicate that deaf sportsmen competed against each other, some report of competitions between deaf and hearing teams. On July 3, 1925 *Het Volk* called on its readers to attend the match on Sunday between F.C. Mariakerke and the “sympathetic eleven of deaf-mutes” of Ghent as a “token of affection for the deaf-mutes”.<sup>195</sup> Between 1919 and 1922, the newspaper *De Schelde* reported on several boxing matches in which “Frenay, the deaf-mute of Liège” competed against hearing opponents. However, the contests were not without their difficulties. The article of May 20, 1921 reported that the referee had to jump in between the boxers to end the match as Frenay could not hear the gong.<sup>196</sup> On June 4, 1922 Frenay had to be knocked-out twice as he did not hear the referee count (figure 6.12).<sup>197</sup>

Pieter Verstraete explains the importance of sports events for the deaf community from three perspectives. First, deaf clubs organizing sports events facilitated contact between the deaf. Second, by engaging in the same sports activities as hearing people, deaf people could counteract the idea that they were ‘abnormal’ and ‘inferior’ to hearing people. Finally, it was a means to promote communication by sign language and challenge the notion that deaf people should learn to speak. Thus, deaf sport clubs had

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<sup>191</sup> “Vertooning van doofstommen” in *Het Laatste Nieuws*, March 20, 1898.

<sup>192</sup> The establishment of this organisation is reported in: “Les journées sportives des silencieux” in *La Wallonie*, August 12, 1922.

<sup>193</sup> “Silent S.C. Gent” in *Het Volk*, April 18, 1925.

<sup>194</sup> “Olympische spelen” in *Het Volk*, February 13, 1924.

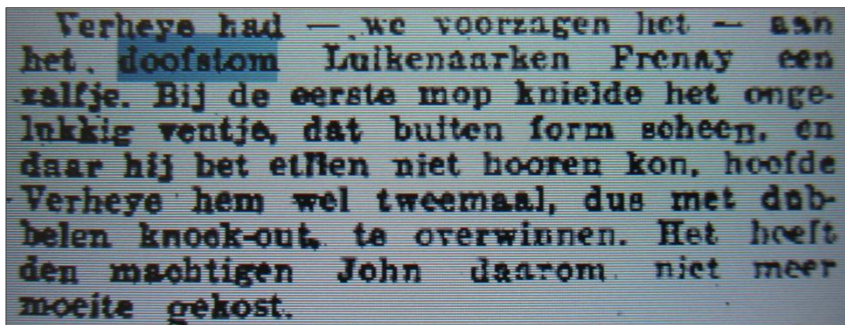
<sup>195</sup> “Terrein Olympia” in *Het Volk*, July 3, 1925.

<sup>196</sup> “De ‘fight’ in al zijn furie” in *De Schelde*, May 21, 1921.

<sup>197</sup> “Boxing-ring, Hippodroom-Paleis” in *De Schelde*, June 4, 1922.

an important role in challenging the negative representation of deaf people in society.<sup>198</sup> Similarly, Burch identified deaf sports as a means to buttress deaf cultural values. Sports was a way to highlight the commonality with mainstream society, but at the same time it helped to foster a sense of deaf community.<sup>199</sup>

Figure 6.12 Article published in *Het Volk*, June 4, 1922<sup>200</sup>



These examples show that by the beginning of the twentieth century deaf people had built up a spectrum of meeting places. Deaf clubs provided a forum to deal with the marginalization by hearing society and to share experiences and goals. They enabled deaf people to establish friendships and affirm their cultural identity, and at the same time, to challenge the forces that aimed to destroy their culture, such as oralism and eugenics. However, the fact that the clubs were established only in the final decades of the nineteenth century and were concentrated in cities leads one to suspect that many of the deaf individuals in the research population, especially those born in the first birth cohort and those living in the countryside, had fewer opportunities to meet other deaf individuals. Moreover, neither the articles, nor the publications by Raemdonck and Scheiris, and Buyens discuss the role of women in the Belgian deaf clubs. According to the historiographical overview of the deaf club known as *Cartonszonen* (from 1958 the *Koninklijke Brugse Dovenvereniging* or the Royal Deaf Society of Bruges), established in 1902, women were admitted to the club in 1928.<sup>201</sup> It is unclear whether women were

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<sup>198</sup> In Belgium, however, due to language and religious disagreements, deaf sports clubs did not succeed in establishing a united deaf community. Verstraete, P. (2012) "Naar een fluïde benadering van dovencultuur en dovengeschiedenis" 152-69. Sports and the deaf community have also been the focal point in: Atherton, M. (2007) "Sport in the British Deaf Community" *Sport in History*, 27/2, 276-92.

<sup>199</sup> Burch, S. (2002) *Signs of Resistance*, 76-7.

<sup>200</sup> Translation: Verheye had – we anticipated it – an easy opponent in the deaf-mute resident of Liège Frenay. After the first blow the unfortunate fellow, who appeared to be out of shape, fell to his knees and, as he could not hear the counting, Verheye had to defeat him twice, so with a double knock-out. This did not require any extra effort from the mighty John.

<sup>201</sup> "Historiek", <<http://www.nowedo.be/clt/nowedo/historiek.php>>, consulted on 08/08/2014.

admitted in the other deaf clubs from their establishment or whether they were permitted entry later on. In a society in which social life was generally more male-centred, it seems plausible that deaf women were initially less involved in club life.<sup>202</sup>

The inability of many research individuals to join a deaf club does not necessarily imply that their social contacts were restricted. However, without the possibility of engaging in more in-depth communication, it seems likely that they were mainly reliant on family, while contacts with hearing non-relatives remained rather superficial. From this perspective, the spread of deaf schools undoubtedly improved the opportunities for deaf men and women to build up a social network. Attending a deaf school may have paved the way for entering a deaf club, but ex-students could also keep in contact in a more personal way. Without personal testimonies, however, it is difficult to form conclusions in this regard.

## 6.4 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to explore the social networks and embedding of deaf men and women within their living environment. To this end, I have examined four aspects of physical and social mobility: household formation and composition, migration behaviour, witness characteristics and opportunities for deaf people to engage in social events. The results of the analyses enable to formulate some cautious conclusions with regard to the social relationships and survival strategies of the deaf – survival strategies as household formation and migration were to an important extent driven by economic considerations as well.

The analyses in this chapter have emphasized the important social and economic role of family in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth century. Although it became less common for deaf singles to have family witnesses present at their death after 1850, the analysis of the household composition showed that relationships with close relatives, in particular parents and siblings, remained as important. The vast majority of deaf and hearing individuals alike relied on parents and siblings for co-residence. They usually only left the parental household after marriage, or in the case of permanent sin-

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<sup>202</sup> The interaction between gender and deaf club life is an interesting topic for future research. An important contribution in this regard has been provided by Octavian Robinson for the United States: Robinson, O.E. (2006) "The Extended Family: Deaf Women in Organizations" In: Brueggemann, B.J. & Burch, S. (eds.) *Women and Deafness: Double Visions*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 40-56.

gles, when they themselves or their parents died. Singles outliving their parents turned predominantly to siblings – either a married sibling to live in their household or unmarried siblings to share a house with them, most often the house of their parents. In the absence of siblings, other relatives – nephews deserve a special mention – could take in deaf family members as well. The analysis of the family witnesses at death and marriage also illustrated the importance of relationships with more distant and often non-co-residing kin. Based on these observations, I argue that the nineteenth-century evolution from informal to formal care, as described in the introduction, needs revision.

Disability historians have stated that in the course of the nineteenth century institutions took over the care of people with disabilities from relatives, who increasingly perceived disabled kin as a burden to the family. The nineteenth-century rise in the number of individuals who were institutionalized during their lives is often quoted as evidence. However, the personal life stories of deaf men and women in my research suggest that institutionalization was to an important extent determined by the pool of available kin, and not necessarily the result of the unwillingness of family to take in a deaf relative. Individuals usually ended up in an institution at a time when they had few relatives with whom co-residence was possible – because they were old, deceased or had migrated. Still, in the course of the nineteenth century, the number of deaf singles moving to an institution, despite having relatives available, increased from 6 to 22 percent. Moreover, more individuals migrated over larger distances, usually to the city of Ghent, to be institutionalized – in the period before, individuals were more likely to enter a local hospital or institute. Despite this increase, however, the vast majority still relied on close family and kin. Furthermore, we need to be careful about assuming that deaf individuals were passive recipients of institutionalization. For example, the story of Marie Therese De Pauw in 6.2.3.3 suggested that deaf individuals may have actively chosen to spend their lives in an institution, especially if the institution was tailored to a deaf clientele. In institutions with multiple deaf persons, deaf men and women could co-reside with people sharing the same experiences and the same ways of communication. As such, they were no longer social ‘outsiders’, but able to engage in more profound friendships with fellow-deaf people. The importance of deaf individuals making contact with other deaf individuals, through the establishment of deaf clubs and the organization of deaf activities from the 1860s onwards, became clear from contemporary newspaper articles. In this development of a deaf community, institutions for the deaf, especially schools, played an important role in bringing deaf individuals together and providing support. These observations lead me to the conclusion that the role of institutions for deaf persons in the nineteenth and early twentieth century should not be overestimated, but neither should it be interpreted from an exclusively negative perspective. In the next chapter, institutional life is further investigated.

While the importance of family was evident from the analyses, the relationship with friends and non-relatives proved more difficult to reconstruct. The analysis of the unrelated marriage and death witnesses indicated that most deaf individuals (and hearing siblings too) were probably not acquainted with their witnesses. The over-representation in both the deaf and sibling cohort of death witnesses working as civil officials suggested that it became more common in the second half of the nineteenth century to have official instead of acquainted witnesses. This change in the profile of the witnesses may therefore reflect a change in customs, rather than a reduction in the social network of people. Moreover, the study of witnesses cannot cover the entirety of friendship relations, nor can it fully indicate how embedded a person is in their surroundings. The lack of speech and hearing undoubtedly influenced the extent to which deaf individuals were able to become socially involved in the community they lived in. Keeping day-to-day contacts and establishing friendships with neighbours, acquaintances and other non-relatives without the possibility of easily conversing definitely entailed more effort from both parties. As such, one can easily imagine that deaf individuals led less varied social lives and were more easily isolated. By the end of the nineteenth century, the opportunities for deaf people to counter this presumed social deprivation increased by events organized by and for the deaf. The terminology used in the contemporary newspaper articles, as well as the description of the organized events reflect feelings of solidarity and friendship between the deaf. Nonetheless, without quantitative information about the involvement of the deaf in these deaf clubs and without personal testimonies it is difficult to make statements about the size and variety of the social networks of the deaf.

In spite of these difficulties, the different outcomes within the deaf and hearing population in several analyses showed the various implications of an auditory impairment on a person's social life and survival strategies. Civil status proved to be of the essence for the living circumstances of a person. From this observation, I start with summarizing the differences between the married deaf and hearing population – keeping in mind, of course, that marriage was the common path in life for the siblings but rather exceptional among the deaf.

With regard to household composition, the majority of married deaf and hearing individuals left their parental household to set up a neolocal household. As the deaf marriages were more often childless, more deaf individuals lived in a conjugal household. The households of both the deaf and hearing siblings were predominantly nuclear, but could be extended to a more complex household for short periods of time. Both deaf and hearing siblings predominantly turned to the support of their children in old age, but as the deaf were more likely to have no or fewer children, they ended up more frequently in an institution or in a household with non-relatives. Hearing widow(er)s without (living) children, on the other hand, turned to siblings more often. This difference might be



the outcome of the reluctance of siblings to co-reside with a deaf brother or sister, but might also reflect the aspiration of the deaf to take care of themselves instead of depending on relatives.

When it comes to migration, the analyses showed that married deaf individuals migrated more often outside their hometown, especially in the first birth cohort, deaf women in particular, and with a higher frequency in the second half of the nineteenth century. We explained these differences by pointing to the higher number of deaf individuals marrying a spouse from a different community, their higher representation in more 'mobile' occupation types and the generally smaller size of deaf families. Both married deaf and hearing individuals were mainly engaged in permanent migration, but temporary migration was more common among the deaf, at least after marriage – before marriage it was more common to move temporarily among the siblings. The deaf moved more often from the countryside to cities within the province – especially to the city of Ghent – while the siblings more often migrated outside the province. The larger number of siblings moving before marriage and over greater distances suggests that deaf individuals were less likely to try their luck in a distant place, particularly on their own. Finally, in both groups relatives constituted the most important witnesses at marriage and death, but the deaf exhibited a smaller variety in related marriage witnesses and seem to have been more reliant on the witnesses of their spouses.

Comparing the deaf with the hearing singles, we find that both groups of singles predominantly relied on their parents and siblings for co-residence. While living with these close relatives most singles had no recorded occupation. Based on the life course data, however, I argued that they most likely contributed to the household income in an informal way, by assisting their parents and siblings in their profession and performing household tasks. Both deaf and hearing women who were living with only men probably had no recorded occupation because they were considered 'housewives' to the men they shared their homes with. As they lived in the parental household as long as possible, singles were less engaged in migration than the married individuals. Comparing the deaf and the siblings, deaf singles were more likely to out-migrate, and migrate in general. We related this difference to the generally higher age at death – and thus more opportunities and perhaps a greater necessity to migrate – and the higher institutionalization rate of the unmarried deaf – institutions were most often located in the cities. Of the singles migrating, nonetheless, the deaf did not exhibit a higher migration frequency than the siblings.

After the death of their parents and if not living in/together with siblings, deaf singles were more often institutionalized and only exceptionally living on their own. For hearing single men, on the other hand, living alone was the most obvious option. It can be debated which lifestyle was to be preferred. The inhabitants of an institution had probably less freedom but always a roof above their heads and enough to eat while peo-

ple living on their own could do as they pleased but often fell prey to economic difficulties. Finally, more deaf singles left their parental house when their parents were still alive, whether or not due to certain circumstances or by choice, almost exclusively to be institutionalized. Institutionalization occurred more often in the linen districts of Ghent and Oudenaarde in particular. I have suggested that the higher institutionalization rate in these districts may have been related to either the proximity of institutions in Ghent or the linen-orientated character of both districts. In a period in which the linen industry was in decline, it may have been financially easier to enter a deaf son or daughter in an institution. After all, the costs of institutionalization were defrayed by local, provincial and national governments.

The previous three chapters explored some of the most important features of adult life, such as making a career for oneself, finding a partner in life, developing a personal network of family and friends, and entering, leaving and belonging to different households. Chronologically, the life phase of adulthood is followed by old age. In the next section, I turn to the analysis of the lives of deaf and hearing people 'at the end': in old age and at death. The focus is also on institutionalization. As the next chapter will show, institutionalization and old age are easily connected (although the relationship between them was hardly exclusive). Old age is studied in a separate chapter in this life course study, but the analyses will show that the experiences of deaf and hearing people as children and adults inevitably influenced their possibilities in old age.



# Old age and death

*“Komt en ziet en roept geschrokken:*

*Ach! Wat is hun leven bang*

*Hunne kerken - zonder klokken,*

*Hunne liedren - zonder zang.*

*De gedachten - zonder poorten,*

*De gevoelens - zonder woorden,*

*En de stemme - zonder klank!*

*Ach! Wat is hun leven bang!”*

*(Anonymous poem, published in *Onze Vriend*, 1941)*

Come and see and shout alarmed:

Oh! What is their life afraid

Their churches - without bells,

Their songs - without singing.

The thoughts - without gateways,

The feelings - without words,

And the voice - without sound!

Oh! What is their life afraid!



## 7 Formal care, old age and mortality

### 7.1 Introduction

In this final thematic chapter, I look at two phases of life which have so far only received superficial attention. On the one hand the focus is on institutionalization, and on the other hand on the lives of the deaf ‘at the end’: in old age and at death. Institutionalization and old age often go hand in hand. 37 percent of the deaf and 16 percent of the hearing population died in an institution. Furthermore, once institutionalized a person was likely to remain in the institution until death. In a controversial study into the institutional lives of young disabled adults in the mid-twentieth century, social scientists Eric Miller and Geraldine Gwynne even stated that people in institutions first experienced a *social death*, after which they gradually made the transition to their *physical deaths*.<sup>1</sup>

Disability scholars David Braddock and Susan Parish have described the nineteenth century as “*the century of institutions and interventions*”.<sup>2</sup> Although this characterization is not entirely unfounded, the previous chapter has emphasized the continuing importance of family in the lives of nineteenth-century deaf men and women. Contrary to the belief that family care ‘eroded’ in the course of the nineteenth century, I argued that the role of institutions in the nineteenth and early twentieth century should not be overestimated. On the other hand, it can hardly be denied that the number of disabled people

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<sup>1</sup> Miller, E. & Gwynne, G. (1972) *A Life Apart: A Pilot Study of Residential Institutions for the Physically Handicapped and the Young Chronic Sick*. London: Tavistock Publications, 89. This study has been criticized by people with disabilities and disability scholars alike because of the way in which the authors reported on the inevitability of the “social death” experienced by “the crippled” in institutional settings, and the prevailing prejudices about disability and dependency.

<sup>2</sup> Braddock, D.L. & Parish, S.L. (2001) “An Institutional History of Disability” In: Seelman, K.D., Albrecht, G.L. & Bury, M. (eds.) *Handbook of Disability Studies*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 39.

who spent (part of) their lives in an institution increased in the course of the nineteenth century. Based on national censuses of the deaf and blind in nineteenth-century Belgium, I have depicted the rise in the number of deaf men and women “residing in a special institution or public hospital” at the time of the censuses in Chapter 2 (Figure 2.20). The downside of the censuses is that they lump all institutions, schools and non-educational institutions together. In Chapter 3 I showed that the increased institutionalization was particularly true with regard to the attendance of educational institutions. In this chapter, the focus is on non-educational institutions for adult deaf men and women. In contrast to the schools, which were intended for deaf pupils exclusively, the institutions in which deaf adults lived were generally not only for deaf people. As I will show, deaf persons resided in a wide range of institutional establishments.

In many respects, this chapter will dissatisfy readers interested in the personal experiences of people living in an institution. The decision to rely on demographic sources to reconstruct the life courses of deaf men and women entails that it is possible to reconstruct the timing and duration of institutionalization, as well as a person’s life before and after this event. In other words, some questions become answerable: which life events made the institutionalization of a person more likely? Was entering an institution an irreversible life trajectory and how did institutionalization affect the opportunities for men and women to work, marry, and shape their own lives? However, the daily experiences of people in an institution remain hidden. Archival sources created by the institutions themselves can shed light on the organization and functioning of a facility. However, writing an institutional history is beyond the scope of this study. Moreover, the wide range of institutions that accommodated deaf individuals would make sifting through the different institutional archives a time-consuming task. The present study into institutionalization primarily aspires to examine the extent to which institutions were part of the lives of deaf individuals in nineteenth-century East Flanders. Section 7.2 explores the frequency, timing and duration of institutionalization (7.2.1), the range of institutions in which deaf people resided (7.2.2), as well as the life before, during and after institutions (7.2.3 and 7.2.4). I end with a brief digression on deaf people in a special type of institution: prison (7.2.6)

Parallel to the course of life itself, the last sections of this life course research deal with old age and mortality. The aim is to detect whether the presence of an auditory impairment resulted in different behaviour in old age and death compared to a hearing population.

Ageing processes are commonly associated with disability. Not only does the prevalence of disability increase with age, old age and disability are also ideologically linked. Older and disabled people have indeed been the topic of comparable discourses of *dependency*, mainly because they can be viewed as lacking economic value. To paraphrase Michael Oliver, both old and disabled people are considered “*an economic problem*” as

both have no role in the production process and are excluded from the labour market.<sup>3</sup> The association of impairment and old age suggests, according to Mark Priestley, that the social position of impaired people in old age may be different from previous stages of life. While functional limitations were considered as deviating from the norm in childhood and adulthood, they became defining characteristics of the ageing process. As a result, older people with impairments may have been perceived as being less *disabled* than children and adults.<sup>4</sup> Specifically related to the research population, we may assume that the *otherness* of deaf people declined as more people experienced hearing loss in old age. Assessing whether attitudes towards deaf people changed in old age and differed from attitudes towards hearing elderly people is difficult based on the available sources. The only comparison we can make is by looking at the living circumstances of the research population in old age. Where did people spend the final years of their lives and do we find differences in the ages at which people retired? These questions are the starting point for the analysis in section 7.3.

Some individuals are fortunate enough to die in old age – others died a more untimely death. A wide interest in the mortality behaviour of past population groups has generated a vast number of mortality studies across time and space. So far, studies have demonstrated variations in mortality risks according to developments in time and according to factors such as age group, sex and living environment. Previous research has indicated that in Early Modern western Europe there was a generally lower life expectancy for infants and children as opposed to adults, for men compared to women and for city dwellers compared to people in the countryside.<sup>5</sup> Since the eighteenth century, as part of a demographic transition, life expectancies in all groups have increased. However, the mortality characteristics of people with disabilities are mostly unexplored territory. Section 7.4 briefly discusses the few studies examining the mortality risks of deaf people. Subsequently, the life course data is used to provide a descriptive overview of the mortality behaviour of the research population and to examine mortality risks by using multivariate regression models.

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<sup>3</sup> Oliver, M. (1993) “Societal Responses to Long-Term Disability” In: Whiteneck, G. et al. (eds.) *Ageing with Spinal Cord Injury*. New York: Demos Publications, 253.

<sup>4</sup> Priestley, M. (2003) *Disability. A Life Course Approach*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 151-2.

<sup>5</sup> Devos, I. (2006) *Allemaal beestjes. Mortaliteit en morbiditeit in Vlaanderen, 18de-20ste eeuw*. Ghent: Academia Press, 25-64.



## 7.2 Institutional living

In their institutional history of disability, Braddock and Parish describe how “*institutional solutions*” to the problems posed by poverty and disability – in the form of houses of correction, workhouses, asylums and madhouses – became more common at the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup> The increased institutionalization of the “*the sick, the mad, the handicapped, [and] the unemployed*” even prompted French philosopher Michel Foucault to portray the period between 1660 and 1800 as a period of “*great confinement*” in Europe.<sup>7</sup> Foucault explained this trend towards institutionalization in the context of a severe economic crisis in Europe at the time, which led to the institutionalization of the “*undifferentiated mass of economically unproductive people*” in hospitals and poorhouses directed to bring about their segregation, assistance and punishment.<sup>8</sup> Institutional provisions were thus first and foremost a response to poverty and the unwillingness of many individuals to comply with the ethic of work.<sup>9</sup> A central element in the “*policing of the poor*” was the distinction between different groups of unproductive people: the temporary and permanent poor, the local and foreign poor, the able-bodied and disabled poor, beggars and vagrants. Based on these classifications, local municipalities took measures involving social control, exclusion, material support and moral re-education.<sup>10</sup>

As the number of poor individuals and the costs of poor relief reached enormous proportions towards the end of the eighteenth century, the distinction between those who were unable to work and therefore the *deserving* poor, and those who were able but did not work, the *undeserving* poor, became the standard for the distribution of poor relief and determined whether a person was entitled to support.<sup>11</sup> In his article on services for the elderly in nineteenth-century Antwerp, historian Gregory Vercauteren illustrated how people unable to work due to illness, disability or old age, or children abandoned by their parents received support in institutions, managed and paid for by the *Commission des Hospices Civiles* (Commission of Civil Hospices). Hospitals, *maisons de refuge* (shelter houses), asylums and schools for the deaf and blind were among the institutions

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<sup>6</sup> Braddock, D.L. & Parish, S.L. (2001) “An Institutional History of Disability”, 29.

<sup>7</sup> Foucault, M. (1965) *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. London: Tavistock, 35-60.

<sup>8</sup> Thomson, R.G. (1997) *Extraordinary Bodies. Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 39.

<sup>9</sup> The development of a modern work ethic is discussed in: Ehmer, J. & Lis, C. (2009) *The Idea of Work in Europe from Antiquity to Modern Times*. Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate Publishing.

<sup>10</sup> Engbersen, G. (2009) *Fatale remedies: over de onbedoelde gevolgen van beleid en Kennis*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 126. See also: Soly, H. & Lis, C. (1980) *Armoede en kapitalisme in pre-industrieel Europa*. Antwerp: Standaard; Lis, C. & Soly, H. (1985) *Op vrije voeten? Sociale politiek in West-Europa (1450-1914)*. Leuven: Kritak.

<sup>11</sup> Engbersen G. (2009) *Fatale remedies*, 126; Lis, C. & Soly, H. (1985) *Op vrije voeten?*, 18-30.

that could accommodate people considered unable to provide for themselves.<sup>12</sup> However, institutionalization was not an option if a person still had family to fall back on or if they were able to work and only temporarily unable to provide for their livelihood. In the latter case, people received support at home, organized by the *Bureaux de Bienfaisance* (Offices of Benevolence).<sup>13</sup> For those who refused to work, beggars and vagrants alike, several correctional facilities were established in the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup> In sum, institutionalization in the Early Modern Period and nineteenth century was to an important extent a response to the growing number of paupers and vagrants. The non-disabled poor who refused to work were disciplined in correctional institutions, while the disabled poor together with orphans, the sick and the elderly were supported in hospitals, hospices and asylums.

However, the increased institutionalization of people with impairments was not only determined by attitudes towards poverty, but also linked to a process of medicalization and professionalization of disability. The eighteenth-century Enlightenment cultivated the belief that it was possible to intervene in the “*immutable natural order*” and to perfect society and mankind.<sup>15</sup> Regarding people with disabilities, enlightened thinkers asserted that human behaviour had laws in the same way as the natural world and could be improved through investigation and education. Thus, through scientific study and education, the life status and skills of disabled people, who were previously perceived as incurable and unimprovable, could be raised.<sup>16</sup> Disability was no longer perceived as the

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<sup>12</sup> Vercauteren, G. (2001) “De zorg voor de behoeftige ouderen te Antwerpen in de negentiende eeuw” *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, 1-2, 253-81. Until the nineteenth century, hospitals provided poor relief rather than care for the sick. In the late Middle Ages, as a response to the growing number of beggars, poor, unemployed and homeless people, hospitals were established to accommodate the poor, sick and the elderly. Only in the early twentieth century did hospitals evolve into the medical facilities they are today. For more information: Vermeiren, L. & Hansen, I. (1998) “Het hospitaalwezen: ziekenzorg voor armen” In: De Maeyer, J. (ed.) *Er is leven voor de dood. Tweehonderd jaar gezondheidszorg in Vlaanderen*. Kapellen: Pelckmans, 43-57.

<sup>13</sup> In 4.5.1 I discussed the developments in the organization of poor relief in the eighteenth to the twentieth century. The dual structure of the poor relief system, consisting of Commissions of civil hospices and Offices of Benevolence, was characteristic of the Southern Netherlands, later Belgium, from 1796 to 1925; Over the years, the systems of poor relief in Flanders have been the focal point of several master’s dissertations. E.g. Vandaele, D. (2001) *Armenzorg op het platteland: de armendis te Loker*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished master’s dissertation); De Cock, K. (2003) *Armenzorg en het bureel van weldadigheid te Sint-Niklaas 1820-1924*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished master’s dissertation); Dewilde, J. (2012) *Armoede en armenzorg in Poperinge*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished master’s dissertation).

<sup>14</sup> Correctional facilities in Flanders have been studied by: De Zutter, J. (2007) *Armoede en sociale disciplineren in de 17<sup>e</sup>-18<sup>e</sup> eeuw: vergelijkende studie over tucht- en correctiehuizen in Vlaanderen en Brabant*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished master’s dissertation). See also 4.5.3.

<sup>15</sup> Braddock, D.L. & Parish, S.L. (2001) “An Institutional History of Disability”, 29.

<sup>16</sup> Wright, D. (2011) *Downs: The History of a Disability*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 32-4.

result of supernatural forces, but given a reasonable and biological explanation. As a result, treatment or some form of rehabilitation became the proper response to disability.<sup>17</sup> This changing perception of disabilities led to the development of a care industry, consisting of a variety of institutions, asylums and schools, and the growing importance of a class of medical and educational professionals. It is in this setting that the establishment of schools for deaf boys and girls needs to be understood.

This is not to say that specialized institutions for people with disabilities were non-existent before the eighteenth century. People with intellectual disabilities – among whom the deaf were occasionally counted – were targets for institutional confinement well before this period. From the twelfth century onwards, several cities accommodated ‘lunatics’ in ‘madhouses’, church dungeons or convents. The lunatic asylum known as *Sint-Jans-ten-Dullen*, established in Ghent in 1191, was one of the oldest ‘madhouses’ in Europe.<sup>18</sup> However, until the early nineteenth century, the goal of these institutions was not to treat the mentally ill, but only to segregate them from society.<sup>19</sup> In the aftermath of the Enlightenment, people with intellectual disabilities were no longer perceived as sinners or possessed persons, but were considered as patients who were entitled to more humane treatment in medically organized asylums.<sup>20</sup>

Besides the establishment of schools for deaf boys and girls throughout Europe, we find no evidence of the development of specialized institutions for deaf adults, in contrast to the blind population. In 1847 the *Commission des Hospices Civiles* in Ghent, based on a donation by the industrialist J. L. Van Caneghem, opened an asylum for the blind, close to Bijloke hospital. The home attended to about 30 blind people, under the direction of the Brothers of Charity. The absence of a comparable institution for deaf individuals in the Flemish region leads to the conclusion that deaf adults were accommodated in institutions housing a more varied group of people. In 7.2.2 I explore the different institutions in which deaf individuals lived.

The development of formal care facilities for disabled individuals went hand in hand with the growth of a medical management of old age and death, as the Enlightenment’s

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*; Linton, S. (1998) *Claiming Disability. Knowledge and Identity*. New York: New York University Press, 48.

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed study into Sint-Jans-ten-Dullen hospital: Van De Putte, F. (2007) *Het Sint-Jans-ten-Dullen hospitaal in het laatmiddeleeuwse Gent. Het vergeten Gentse dulhuis*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished master’s dissertation).

<sup>19</sup> Shorter, E. (1997) *A History of Psychiatry: From the Era of the Asylum to the Age of Prozac*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 4; Kaiser, L.H.W.M. (2007) *Psychiatrie togelicht*. Antwerp: Garant, 22-3.

<sup>20</sup> In Flanders, physician Jozef Guislain (Ghent, February 2, 1797 - April 1, 1860) played a vital role in the development of care for the mentally ill. Information on his life and psychiatric developments in Belgium can be found in: Godderis, J. (1998) “De geesteszieken: nieuwe inzichten en instellingszorg” In: De Maeyer, J. (ed.) *Er is leven voor de dood. Tweehonderd jaar gezondheidszorg in Vlaanderen*. Kapellen: Pelckmans, 58-68.

primary focus on *this* world resulted in a secularization of death.<sup>21</sup> Although geriatrics as a specific subfield only developed in the late nineteenth century, the eighteenth century's growing awareness of more specific health issues in old age indicates a more medicalized view of the end of life.<sup>22</sup> The parallel increase in the number of elderly non-disabled individuals in institutions reflects this process.

In sum, several related forces in the eighteenth century – the desire to discipline the indigent and restore the unemployed to economic productivity, together with the belief in progress and the improvability of people – combined to promote the institutionalization of various groups in society, the poor and the disabled in particular. Therefore, the development of institutions across Europe was inextricably linked to a process of social discipline and a medicalization and professionalization of the way in which disability, old age and death were dealt with. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the trend towards institutionalization gained even greater momentum.

The actual provision of institutional care in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was the result of a combined action of religious *caritas*, growing secular intervention and donations by generous benefactors.

Education, poor relief and care of the sick were traditionally the responsibility of the Church. From the Middle Ages onwards, religious men and women took care of those in need of assistance in infirmaries connected to monasteries and convents, in hospitals and hospices.<sup>23</sup> The dominant role of the Church in poor and sick relief was more or less uncontested until the end of the eighteenth century. Under French rule (1794-1815), poor and sick relief in the Southern Netherlands underwent a profound reorganization. The French laws of 1796 resulted in the establishment of the Offices of Benevolence and Commission of Civil Hospices in each municipality (see 4.5.1). The latter in particular shifted the development of institutions for the sick and poor from private institutions to public ones, which were directed by a municipal commission and financed with public funding. Two resolutions were passed in 1796 and 1797 to abolish all religious congregations in the Southern Netherlands. These measures seriously endangered the role of the church in poor and sick relief. In Ghent, for example, the laws led to the expulsion in 1799 of the nuns working at Bijloke hospital. However, an acute shortage of adequate

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<sup>21</sup> Lewis, M.J. (2007) *Medicine and Care of the Dying: A Modern History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 65; von Kondratowitz, H.-J. (2003) "The Medicalization of Old Age. Continuity and Change in Germany from the Late Eighteenth to the Early Twentieth Century" In: Pelling, M. & Smith, R.M. (eds.) *Life, Death and the Elderly: Historical Perspectives*. London: Routledge, 112-37.

<sup>22</sup> Ottaway, S. (2013) "The Elderly in the Eighteenth-Century Workhouse" In: Reinarz, J. & Schwarz, L. (eds.) *Medicine and the Workhouse*. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer Limited, 51.

<sup>23</sup> Institutions designed for the punishment of the poor reluctant to work, beggars and vagrants, on the other hand, were established by secular authorities.

and affordable laic personnel made the French government reconsider its decision. Subsequent decrees in 1804 and 1809 reinstated the legal status of the religious congregations devoted to the care of sick and destitute people. Religious congregations took on the role of care workers in institutions which were managed and financed by the Commission of Civil Hospices.<sup>24</sup> This implied that most patients were placed in an institution and paid for by the Commission of Civil Hospices, while the congregations took responsibility for the day-to-day care.

In addition, the network of facilities benefitted from donations by Maecenases from the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie and the business world. For example, donations by industrialist Jacob Lieven van Caneghem (1764-1849) and textile baron Ferdinand Lousberg (1799-1859) led to the establishment of respectively a hospice for the blind and a retirement home for impaired and deprived textile workers in Ghent. These institutions were managed by the Commission of Civil Hospices, while religious or laic personnel took care of the daily management.<sup>25</sup>

Most of the individuals in this research resided in an institution in the provincial capital Ghent. The history of the care of the sick and poor in Ghent is very much linked to the personality of the priest Petrus Jozef Triest. In 1807 Triest became a member of the Commission of Civil Hospices in Ghent and, as such, director of Bijloke hospital, director of twelve so-called 'little hospices' or homes for poor elderly people, general guardian of orphans, foundlings and abandoned children, director of the Sint-Jans Hospital for foundlings and the *Kulderhouse* for orphans, crisis manager of the military hospital and chaplain of the society known as *Les Dames de la Charité Maternelle*, which took care of infants and their mothers. Under Dutch rule (1815-1830), Triest also took responsibility for the beggars' workhouse, became a member of the board of employment for prisoners and the director of the *Bergen van Barmhartigheid* (Mount of Piety, which provided the poor with loans). In addition, Triest had founded the congregations of the Brothers and Sisters of Charity, who specialized in the establishment of hospices for the incurably ill, facilities for the mentally ill, orphanages and special schools for deaf, blind and 'de-

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<sup>24</sup> Vermeiren, L. & Hansen, I. "Het hospitaalwezen: ziekenzorg voor armen", 45-6; Labbeke, L. & Poels, G.M.J. (2008) *Bezielde zorg: verpleging door katholieke religieuzen in Nederland en Vlaanderen (negentiende-twintigste eeuw)*. Hilversum: Verloren; van Heijst, A., Derks, M. & Monteiore, M.E. (2010) *Ex caritate: kloosterleven, apostolaat en nieuwe spirit van actieve vrouwelijke religieuzen in Nederland in de 19<sup>e</sup> en 20<sup>e</sup> eeuw*. Hilversum: Verloren.

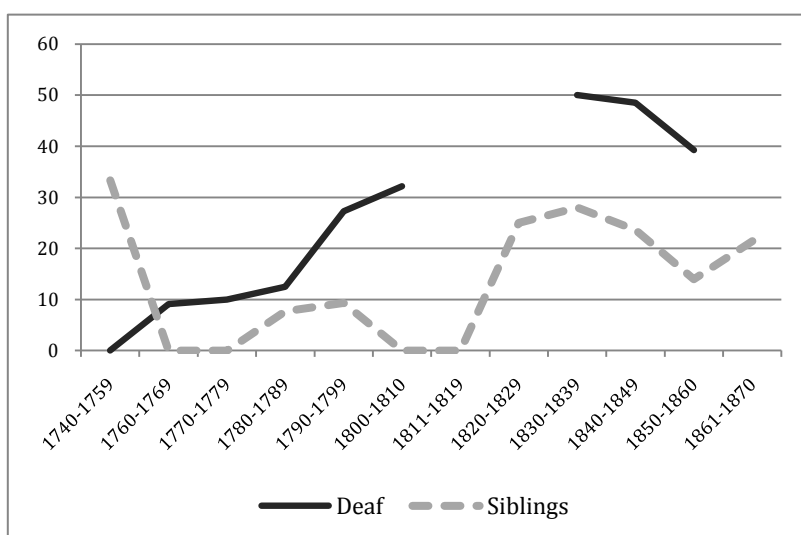
<sup>25</sup> The Van Caneghem hospice was managed by the Brothers of Charity. However, the nineteenth-century monopoly of the Church in sectors such as education and health care spurred the Commission of Civil Hospices to appoint laic personnel in the Lousbergs institute. Coolens, E. (1998) "Het Lousbergsgesticht: een stedelijk rusthuis in het industriële Gent" In: De Maeyer, J. (ed.) *Er is leven voor de dood. Tweehonderd jaar gezondheidszorg in Vlaanderen*. Kapellen: Pelckmans, 94-6.

ranged' children.<sup>26</sup> The monopolization of deaf schools and institutional care by the Brothers and Sisters of Charity may explain why many deaf men and women made an easy transition from the deaf schools to other institutions later in life (infra).

Having briefly considered the motivations behind the establishment and the actual providers of institutions, I now turn to more empirical aspects of institutionalization. Did an increasing number of deaf individuals face institutionalization in the course of the nineteenth century? In which types of institutions were deaf people to be found? And which personal characteristics contributed to or helped to avoid institutionalization? These questions are discussed below.

### 7.2.1 Numbers, timing and duration of institutionalization

**Figure 7.1** Percentage of individuals in non-educational institutions according to birth cohort (% compared to total population)



Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Figure 7.1 displays the percentages of deaf and hearing men and women in the dataset who spent part of their lives in an institution according to birth cohort.<sup>27</sup> In the analysis I only took into account non-educational institutions such as hospitals, asylums and hospices. As a result, the institutionalization took place when the individuals had reached adulthood. The gradient of the curve shows that in the course of the nineteenth

<sup>26</sup> “Congregatie”, <http://www.fracarita.org/category/deelsite/congregatie>, consulted on 3/09/ 2014.

<sup>27</sup> The curve is interrupted between 1810 and 1830 and stops in 1860 for the deaf population as no deaf individuals in the dataset were born in these periods. This lacuna is the outcome of the selection procedure by which only deaf individuals born before 1810 and between 1830 and 1860 were selected (2.1.1.6).

century there was a sharp increase in the percentage of institutionalized deaf men and women. Among the men and women born between 1840 and 1849, 50 percent experienced institutionalization. In the subsequent birth cohort there is a slight decrease, but institutionalization rates remain high. As there are no data available for individuals born after 1860, it is difficult to establish whether the decrease in the final birth cohort was part of a long-term decline or only a small deviation from the upward trend. The curve for the sibling population shows less evidence of a distinct tendency, but also indicates a higher institutionalization rate among those born between 1820 and 1870. At all times, however, institutionalization was less frequent among the hearing population compared to the deaf.<sup>28</sup>

In total, 93 deaf persons and 39 hearing siblings were institutionalized during their lives. However, without looking into the *timing* and *duration* of institutionalization, it is difficult to assess how their stay in an institution affected their life courses. In the course of the nineteenth century, an increasing number of people died in a hospital. Many of them only spent their last days or weeks in the hospital and so the effect institutional living was very limited. For this reason, it is necessary to examine the age at which the individuals entered and left the institution, and the number of days they spent there. Table 7.1 provides a summary of the number of individuals who were institutionalized according to disability. I distinguish between those individuals who were registered in an institution just once, and those who were registered in an institution in multiple, subsequent records. For both categories, I have calculated the average age at which individuals entered an institution for the first time. For the individuals with multiple institutional recordings, I calculated the average duration of institutionalization (in years).

A calculation of the *timing* of institutionalization shows that the 93 deaf persons were on average 45.6 years old (median 41.9 years old) when they entered a non-educational institution for the first time. However, this average conceals large differences within the group of institutionalized deaf men and women.

About 29 deaf individuals (31 percent) were registered in an institution only once. For 25 persons the sole registration occurred at death. About half of them only died in an institution and resided in a normal household until shortly before death. Generally they died in a hospital. For the other half, I have information about their residence only at the time of death, due to the absence of population registers. It is thus possible that these individuals entered the institution well before their deaths. Some of the types of

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<sup>28</sup> The peak in the first sibling birth cohort can be explained by the low number of individuals in this cohort (N=3), one of whom died in a poorhouse.

institutions mentioned in the death certificates indeed suggest that residents probably had been in the institution over a longer period of time. Several deaf men and women were recorded to have died in a poorhouse, an asylum for incurables or a hospice. In contrast to hospitals, these institutions usually entailed a prolonged stay. However, without extra source materials it is difficult to substantiate this assumption. Four individuals were registered in an institution before death. However, for all of them the life course analysis stopped prematurely due to migration to an unknown destination. It is thus possible that these individuals moved to an institution in another municipality, but this is uncertain. The individuals with one institutional recording were on average 60.1 years old (median 62.2 years old) on first entering an institution and are largely responsible for the quite high average age at first institutionalization.

**Table 7.1** Number of people in an institution according to disability (N, average age and period in years)

	Deaf			Siblings		
	N	Age	Period	N	Age	Period
<b>One institutional recording</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>60.1</b>	-	<b>28</b>	<b>60.6</b>	-
<i>At death</i>	25	62.5	-	26	59.5	-
<i>Before death</i>	4	44.9	-	2	75.6	-
<b>Multiple institutional recordings</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>21.1</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>68.2</b>	<b>6.2</b>
<i>Permanent until death</i>	53	41.7	22.8	11	68.2	6.2
<i>Temporary until death</i>	7	26.5	14.1	0	-	-
<i>Temporary/unknown</i>	4	24.7	15.9	0	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>45.6</b>	<b>21.1</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>62.8</b>	<b>6.2</b>

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Notes: "temporary until death" refers to individuals who moved in and outside the same or different institutions, but eventually died in an institution.

The other 64 deaf persons (69 percent) were recorded in an institution in multiple records, meaning they unquestionably lived in an institution over a period of time. On average they were about 39 years old (median 31.3 years old) at admission. The majority of the deaf men and women thus entered an institution in the middle of adulthood.

Once institutionalized, the vast majority (83 percent, N=53) remained permanently in the same institution until death. As a result, these deaf men and women usually resided in an institution for the larger part of their adult lives, for an average period of 22.8 years (median 21.1 years). However, several persons spent many more years in an institution. For example, Marie Therese De Pauw left the house of her parents in Temse in October 1866 to return to the asylum of the Sisters of Charity in Ghent three years after her graduation. She remained in the *Hospice des Incurables* until her death in 1930. Marie Therese lived in the institution for over 64 years. One month before, in September 1866, Rosalie Nathalie Batsele had entered the asylum as well. Marie Therese and Rosalie



Nathalie were probably acquainted as both girls entered the school for deaf girls in 1853 and attended the school in the same period. Like Marie Therese, Rosalie Nathalie resided in the institution until her death in 1908, for a period of more than 52 years. These stories suggest that institutions were considered a permanent home or otherwise that a person's options for leaving an institution were limited.

Still, eleven persons left the institution they lived in either temporarily or permanently. Octavie Ide lost both her parents after she finished her education at the deaf school in Ghent. In 1860, she therefore moved to the house of her aunt in Evergem. Yet, in 1861 she returned to the institution of the Sisters of Charity, where she lived until July 1895. At age 53, she returned to Evergem for five years. Because the population registers of Evergem are not accessible it is unclear with whom she was living during this period. In 1900, she returned to Ghent to spend the last 18 years of her life in the *Hospice des Incurables*. Amelie Meersman even moved several times between institutions and private households. After graduating from the school for deaf girls in Ghent, Amelie remained in the convent of the Sisters of Charity for three more years. At age 21, she moved from Ghent to Kwatrecht, where another convent of the Sisters of Charity was located. However, in 1891, when Amelie was 35 years old, she returned to Ghent and lived by herself for six years. She probably rented a room above a tavern, as the population register recorded that she was living “*in den tamboer*” (in the drummer). In 1897 Amelie moved from Ghent to Zele to stay in a hospice for elderly people – despite the fact that she was only 40 years old at the time. She stayed in the institution until 1901, after which she moved to the house of her brother Franciscus and his family, situated in the same municipality. After 26 years, when Amelie had reached the age of 71, she returned to Ghent and spent the final four years of her life in an institution of the Sisters of Charity. Similarly, five other deaf men and women moved in between family households and institutions, all to end up in an institution in the final years of their lives. The fact that they were generally younger when they first entered an institution (26.5 years old) may explain why they had more opportunities to leave an institution. Indeed, the chances of having relatives with whom one could live or of finding employment and starting an independent household – prerequisites for leaving an institution – were indeed better at a young age. When they entered an institution for the last time, the institution in which they died, they had reached a considerably older average age of 52.7 (median 58.2).

One individual stayed only temporarily in an institution. According to his individual bulletin, Conrad Snauwaert resided in an institution in Ghent in his twenties and early thirties. However, in 1867 he returned to the house of his widowed mother in Gottem. After the death of his mother he became a domestic servant to a farmer's family in Gottem. He died in his employer's house in 1897. The remaining three individuals in the category ‘temporary/unknown’ moved to an unidentified destination, so it is unknown whether they died in an institution. Rosalie D'hont stayed in the *Hospice des Incurables* of

the Sisters of Charity in Ghent between the ages of 21 and 29. In 1832, she left the institution to go to an unknown destination.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Pierre Hoste left the institution of the Brothers of Charity in Ghent at age 31. As Rosalie and Pierre were still young when they left the institution, it is likely that they spent – at least a part of – their lives outside institutional walls. Emmanuel De Petter, on the other hand, moved from the mental institution known as *Hospice Guislain* in Ghent to his hometown of Temse when he was almost 82. Emmanuel's old age makes it likely that he was institutionalized in his hometown as well. Unfortunately, the population registers that could verify this assumption are missing. Regardless of these last four individuals, it is safe to say that once institutionalized, a person's life course was permanently influenced by institutions. Either they never returned to an independent living situation, or they still ended up in an institution in later life.

Calculations according to birth cohort indicate that 19 percent of the deaf men and women born in the first birth cohort were institutionalized. In the second birth cohort, the percentage rose to 46 percent of the deaf experiencing institutionalization. Moreover, whereas those born before 1810 spent on average 11.4 years in an institution, those born between 1830 and 1860 were institutionalized on average for 23.6 years. The deaf population clearly underwent an increase in institutionalization in the course of the nineteenth century, and for an increasingly longer period. However, for 44 percent of the deaf population in the first cohort I only know their residence at death, so we need to be cautious in the interpretation of these results. Nonetheless, based on the results above, the growing impact of institutions in the lives of the deaf can hardly be denied. Similar observations can be made for the hearing population. In the course of the nineteenth century, the number of siblings who spent time in an institution increased from 6 percent to 21 percent. Despite the increase in both groups, table 7.1 reveals important differences between the deaf and the siblings.

A first difference is the much lower institutionalization rate: only 14 percent of all siblings (N=39) were recorded in an institution compared to 33 percent of the deaf (N=93). This difference may be the outcome of, on the one hand, social legislation and attitudes toward institutionalization, and on the other hand of the different life trajectories of the siblings. In the introduction, I stated that institutionalization by the authorities was unlikely if a person still had family to fall back on or was able to work. In Chapter 5, I described the much higher chance of siblings marrying and starting a family. Therefore, we can assume that siblings more often had family to fall back on in peri-

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<sup>29</sup> In the case of Rosalie D'hont, it is still possible that she was institutionalized in the unknown place of destination. However, she did not return to Ghent to be institutionalized, nor was she found in an institution in her home community.

ods of economic distress and so were less likely to enter an institution. The lower marriage rates and higher incidence of unemployment among the deaf, on the other hand, may have prompted their institutionalization. In 7.2.3, I explore the life trajectories of the deaf and hearing in more detail to determine the characteristics that favoured or hindered institutionalization.

A second difference is the timing of institutionalization. 72 percent of the institutionalized siblings (N=28) were recorded in an institution only once, almost exclusively at death. On average, the siblings were 59.5 years old (median 67.5 years old) when they entered an institution – and died. The remaining 28 percent (N=11) were registered in an institution more than once. On average they were 68.2 years old (median 69.6 years old) at admission. These averages show that the siblings were much older when they were institutionalized, compared to the deaf.

The third difference relates to the duration of institutionalization. 67 percent of the institutionalized siblings (N=26) only died in an institution, most often in a hospital. In the second half of the nineteenth century in particular, it became more common for individuals to die in a hospital. This means these persons resided in an institution only for a very short period. In fact, in most death certificates it was specified that the person died in the hospital, but was domiciled in their own house. The 11 siblings who were recorded in an institution multiple times generally spent 6.2 years (median 3.4 years) in an institution – a substantially shorter period compared to the deaf.

In short, fewer siblings spent part of their lives in an institution, they were generally older when they did and, consequently, resided in the institution for a shorter period of time.

## 7.2.2 A wide range of institutions

So far, I have used the word *institution* in a quite general sense. Yet, deaf individuals were to be found in a wide range of institutions. Classifying the different institutions into categories is a challenging task. Not only is the classification hindered by the information in the civil and population registers, but also by the lack of specialization in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century institutions. Indeed, many institutions took care of a varied group of people – orphans, sick, disabled and elderly people – in the same building.

Registrars of civil records were often not consistent in their description of the institutional residences of persons. The institution of the Sisters of Charity in Ghent for incurables was referred to in different certificates as the “asylum”, “hospice” or “hospital” for the “incurables”, occasionally as the “Convent of the Sisters of Charity” or the “District of the Holy Heart”. A comparison of the addresses confirmed that these descriptions referred to one and the same institution, situated in Molenaarsstraat. Conversely,

it was often difficult to determine in which institution a person resided based on the address. Population registers often only reported the address at which a person lived, without specifying that the address referred to an institution. This should not be an obstacle per se as various publications provide information about the locations of nineteenth-century institutions.<sup>30</sup> However, the problem is that one address can encompass several types of institutions. This brings us to the second difficulty.

Many institutions in the nineteenth century accommodated different groups of residents, usually in separate wards. As an example, the institution of the Sisters of Charity in Molenaarsstraat accommodated both a school for deaf-mute girls, a convent for nuns, a hospice for people who were incurably ill or impaired and a home for elderly people. Consequently, if the information in the civil and population registers was limited to the “institution of the Sisters of Charity” or even only “Molenstraat”, it was difficult to determine in which type of institution a person resided. Similarly, a reference to Bijloke in Ghent could refer to residency in the civil hospital, the home for elderly men or the abbey.

**Table 7.2** Types of institutions according to disability and gender, in %<sup>31</sup>

Type of institution	N=	Deaf		Siblings	
		Men	Women	Men	Women
Poorhouse		56	51	25	17
Hospital		3.6	0	8	5.9
Hospice or convent		14.3	23.6	48	47
Mental institution		55.4	58.8	28	5.9
Home for the elderly		19.6	9.8	4	5.9
	<i>Total</i>	7.1	7.8	12	35.3
		100	100	100	100

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Based on the institutions mentioned in the civil and population registers, I discern that the research population stayed in more or less five types of institutions. I have based the classification on the main target group of each institution type: 1) poorhouses, which were intended to accommodate the poor, 2) hospitals for the sick, 3) hospices or convents, which took care of a varied group of poor, sick and disabled individuals, 4) mental

<sup>30</sup> In this regard, for Ghent we can mention: Steyaert, J.J. (1857) *Volledige beschrijving van Gent, of Geschiedkundige beschouwing van deze stad en hare bewoners: de merkwaardige gebouwen, gestichten en maetschappijen, de beroemde Gentenaren, enz.* Ghent: Van Doosselaere.

<sup>31</sup> Table 7.2 takes into account 107 unique institutional recordings for 93 deaf persons, 42 unique institutional recordings for 39 siblings. The number of unique institutional recordings exceeds the number of institutionalized persons because some persons stayed in more than one type of institution in the course of their lives.

institutions specialized in residents who were considered mentally ill, and 5) homes for the elderly, which accommodated men and women in old age. The distribution of the research population over these different types of institutions is shown in table 7.2.<sup>32</sup> Although this classification scheme helps to structure the institutional experiences of the research population, the distinction between the types of institutions is not always clear-cut. In this regard, Jan Maarten Boot and Mat Knapen state that while the different institutions had a name referring to a specific function – an orientation towards a particular target group – in reality, the differences between the residents and the assistance provided were limited.<sup>33</sup> A brief description of these five types of institutions illustrates the characteristics of each institution, but also the flexibility with which persons could be admitted to the different types of institutions.

### Poorhouses

With the exclamation “Never have I seen so much greyness in one place!” the Dutch physician Arnold Aletrino (1858-1919) described the poorhouse in Amsterdam in his 1910 publication. Aletrino explained how the function of poorhouses developed over time. Initially poorhouses were intended to be workhouses in which people who were unwilling to work, like vagrants and beggars, could be detained and put to work. Thus they were first and foremost intended to be places where idle persons were disciplined through labour. However, in time they became reception centres for a varied group of people with no means of survival. This included “decent” and “good” people who were unable to work because of physical limitations or impairment or old age, as well as people belonging to “the sediments of society”, such as beggars and drunks. The people in the poorhouse received the basic necessities, such as a place to sleep and food, but conditions were not supposed to be better than outside the institution. In this way, municipalities prevented the poorhouse from becoming a popular place of refuge, which would have put pressure on their finances and the space available in the refuge.<sup>34</sup> In this regard, Iain Hutchison specified that poorhouse admission was rarely a choice, but often the outcome of an intervention by the local authorities.<sup>35</sup> Poorhouses usually consisted of sleeping areas and workshops in which people who were able to work were expected to engage in activities such as weaving and spinning among others, which were divided

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<sup>32</sup> Each institutionalized person is counted once in the table, except if he or she resided in different types of institutions in the course of their lives.

<sup>33</sup> Boot, J.M. & Knapen, M.H.J.M (2005). *De Nederlandse gezondheidszorg*. Houten: Bohn Stafleu van Loghum, 49.

<sup>34</sup> Aletrino, A. (1910) “Idylle” *Elsevier’s Geïllustreerd Maandschrift*, 20/40, 41-62. The report by Aletrino was the result of his professional activities in the poorhouse of Amsterdam.

<sup>35</sup> Hutchison, I. (2007) *A History of Disability in Nineteenth-Century Scotland*. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 236.

up according to gender. In addition, there was an infirmary where those who were incurably ill “awaited their death”, as Aletrino wrote.<sup>36</sup> David Turner too has described how, despite their original purpose, poorhouses were increasingly used to house the weak, the aged and the sick poor. There were infirmaries where people received some medical care, but only the bare minimum.<sup>37</sup> In the second half of the nineteenth century, institutionalization in a poorhouse became less common.

Two deaf men and three hearing siblings resided in a poorhouse, according to civil registration records. The deaf Engelbertus De Bliet died in the poorhouse of his hometown of Vrasene when he was 67 years old. He probably worked in the institution as his death certificate indicated he was a worker. While it is unclear how long Engelbertus lived in the poorhouse before his death, we know that Jan Baptist Van Cleemput, born deaf in 1786, lived in the poorhouse of Waasmunster for at least 10 years. The population register of 1847 specified that the 60-year-old Jan Baptist lived and worked as a labourer in the poorhouse until his death in December 1856. The population register recorded many people at the address of the institution, most of whom had no occupation. This lack of occupations confirms that the poorhouse was mainly intended to accommodate people incapable of working, instead of putting to work those people reluctant to work. Jan Baptist was not the only one in his family who had difficulties in providing for his maintenance as both his sisters, Maria Josepha and Joanna Francisca, resided in the poorhouse as well. Three of the hearing siblings died in a poorhouse. Two had reached their sixties, but Joseph Ryckbosch died in the poorhouse of Bruges when he was only 22.

## Hospitals

Although hospitals were in no way directed at disciplining the poor, a closer look at the history of hospitals suggests that it was not always clear how they differed from poorhouses – at least as far as the provision of medical care was concerned. When hospitals were first established, in the early Middle Ages, they were mainly institutions for poor relief rather than centres of medical care. The poor, the sick and the elderly could take refuge in the hospital and receive housing and food. However, in the course of the sixteenth century the function of hospitals changed. Wars, epidemics of plague and famines, combined with a significant increase in the number of poor, sick and unemployed

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<sup>36</sup> Aletrino A. (1910) “Idylle”.

<sup>37</sup> Turner, D.M. (2012) *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England: Imagining Physical Impairment*. New York: Routledge, 7. For more on medical care in poorhouses: Reinartz, J. & Schwarz, L. (2013) *Medicine and the Workhouse*. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer Limited; Boulton, J. & Schwarz, L. (forthcoming) “The Parish Workhouse, the Parish and Parochial Medical Provision in Eighteenth-Century London” In: King S. & Gestrich A. (eds.) *Narratives of Sickness and Poverty in Europe*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

people, resulted in hospitals facing financial difficulties and staff shortages. This led to hospitals becoming more selective in the admission of patients. Able-bodied poor people, old people, vagrants and homeless people were referred to hospices, homes for the elderly and poorhouses. Now only sick people were admitted to hospitals. The hospitalization was either financed by the parish in the case of poor patients – from 1796 onwards by the Commission of Civil Hospices – or by the patients themselves if they were sufficiently moneyed.<sup>38</sup> However, a study into the patient population of Sint-Elisabeth hospital in Antwerp between 1833 and 1873 shows that the vast majority of patients were destitute. Those with the financial means to pay for a doctor's visit were generally treated in the comfort of their own home.

Although the emphasis in the hospitals shifted from people in need to people who were sick, medical care remained of minor concern until the nineteenth century. In fact, hospitals were accused of providing the opposite of a cure and were referred to as "*C'est la mort*" (It is death) because of the restricted medical infrastructure and questionable sanitary conditions.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, two studies into the patient population of Bijloke hospital in Ghent (between 1625 and 1629) and the Sint-Elisabeth hospital in Antwerp (between 1833 and 1873) show that respectively only about 14.3 percent and 13.4 percent of the patient population died in the hospital. Thus, the vast majority of the patient population was discharged from the hospital, cured or otherwise. On average, patients left both hospitals between 20 and 26 days after their hospitalization – in other words, after a short period of time.<sup>40</sup> According to Velle, hospitals only became medical care facilities in the early twentieth century, due to improvements in the hospital infrastructure, the training of staff and medical progress.<sup>41</sup>

About 22 percent of the deaf men and women (N=20) spent part of their lives in a hospital. In the sibling cohort, hospital patients represent half of the institutionalized people

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<sup>38</sup> Vermeiren, L. & Hansen, I. (1998) "Het hospitaalwezen: ziekenzorg voor armen", 43-57. For more on hospital care: De Keyaser, R., Dhondt, R. & Mattens, W. (1981) *Geschiedenis van de ziekenverzorging*. Leuven: Acco; Granshaw, L. & Porter, R. (1989) *The Hospital in History*. London: Routledge; Velle, K. (1988) "Kerk, geneeskunde en gezondheidszorg in de 19de en het begin van de 20ste eeuw" In: Depuydt, J. et. al. (eds.) *Het verbond der verzorgingsinstellingen, 1938-1988. Vijftig jaar ten dienste van de Caritas-verzorgingsinstellingen*. Brussel: VVI, 37-60.

<sup>39</sup> Havelange, C. (1987) "L'hôpital à la croisée des chemins. La question des malades payants à la fin du XIXe et au début du XXe siècle" *Annalen van de Belgische Vereniging voor Hospitaalgeschiedenis*, 25, 84.

<sup>40</sup> Vermeiren, L. & Hansen, I. (1998) "Het hospitaalwezen: ziekenzorg voor armen", 48-50; Roels, S. (1999) *De Bijloke in de branding: de werking van het Bijlokehospitaal te Gent, 1550-1630*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished master's dissertation), 76-88.

<sup>41</sup> Velle, K. (1988) "Kerk, geneeskunde en gezondheidszorg in de 19de en het begin van de 20ste eeuw", 96. For more on the medical development of hospitals: Lindeman, M. (1999) *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

(N=20). All the deaf and hearing persons who were hospitalized died in the hospital. This observation seemingly contradicts the research for Bijloke and Sint-Elisabeth hospitals. However, this anomaly can be easily explained: it was only if a person died in the hospital that their hospitalization was recorded in the sources – more specifically, in the death certificate. A temporary stay in a hospital was not recorded in civil registration as the person's domicile was still their home. So the only individuals we find in the demographic sources are those who died in the hospital. The duration of the hospitalization is mostly unknown. In respectively 55 and 60 percent of the cases, the population registers show that the deaf persons and siblings were not domiciled at the hospital but at a different address. Therefore, we have an indication that these men and women only died in the hospital, most probably after a short stay. For 30 percent of the hospitalized deaf and siblings, we only know that they died in the hospital. As there are no population registers available, it is impossible to assess whether they were permanent residents of the hospital or domiciled at another address. The population registers indicate the length of the stay in the hospital for just five individuals. Clemence Van Overbeke, sister of the deaf Adelaide, was reported to have left her hometown of Zeveren on April 7, 1883 to be hospitalized in Deinze. According to her death certificate, she died in the hospital ten days later. Dominicus De Graeve, also hearing, spent about two months in the military hospital of Groningen in the Netherlands during his military service. He died in the hospital aged 20. Three deaf individuals, however, were hospitalized for a particularly long period. Joanna Catherina Callens had been hospitalized for no less than thirteen years, when she died aged 74 from the effects of cancer. Eduardus De Cloedt spent nine years in the hospital of his hometown of Nevele and Catherine Nuytens, who was hospitalized after graduating from the school for deaf girls in Ghent, spent six years in the hospital until she died aged 24. The entry list of the school for deaf girls specified that she died of tuberculosis.

## **Hospices**

A third type of institution, in which the majority of deaf individuals ended up, were hospices – often called convents in the sources as they were usually managed by religious congregations. Hospices resembled poorhouses and hospitals in the way that they provided accommodation and support for people unable to live independently, because of poverty, old age, sickness or impairment. In contrast to poorhouses, however, the emphasis was less on work and more on care. Moreover, while hospitals were directed towards care in the short term, hospices usually accommodated residents until death.

Indeed, of the deaf and siblings admitted to a hospice, respectively 93 percent and 88 percent died in the institution. As people generally stayed in a hospice for a long period of time, the hospice was considered the official abode of a person. Therefore, moving in and out of a hospice left traces in the population registers. The deaf residents were on average 41 (median 34) when they entered a hospice and stayed, on average, 22.2 years.



The siblings were much older at the time of admission, on average 72, and consequently spent fewer years in the hospice, on average 5.7 years. Nonetheless, these averages illustrate that hospices were considered to be permanent residences.

Hospices were often managed by religious congregations, but could also have a secular foundation. Craft guilds, for example, could establish a hospice to take care of their members in illness or old age.<sup>42</sup> In mid-nineteenth century Ghent, there were three such hospices for elderly tailors, weavers and fullers.<sup>43</sup> However, the hospices mentioned in the dataset all had a religious orientation. Of the 57 deaf individuals who resided in a hospice, 38 individuals or 67 percent resided in a hospice in Ghent. More specifically, most deaf men resided in a hospice of the Brothers of Charity situated in Bijlokestraat – from 1878 onwards in Appelstraat. The hospice of the Brothers of Charity was an extension of the school for deaf boys, situated in the same street, and housed only deaf men. In contrast, all the deaf women and four men were accommodated in the *Hospice des Incurables* of the Sisters of Charity, located in Molenaarsstraat. This hospice housed people with various incurable illnesses, among which, but not exclusively, deaf men and women. In a letter to an unknown addressee, dated May 4, 1827, canon Jozef Triest described the wide range of incurably ill persons accommodated in the hospice: “*In het gasthuis zyn ‘er gemeynelyk ongeveer 125 ongeneesbare zieken, waar van het grootste deel te bedde liggen, daar onder eenige met kankers, sommige met andere wonden en verscheyde met lammigheden, onder deze zyn ‘er menigvuldige die niet bekwaem zyn, hunne noodzakelykheden naar behoorte te doen en die gevolgentlyk dickwils op den dag verschooning noodig hebben*” (There are about 125 incurably ill persons living in the hospital, of whom most are bedridden, some have cancers, others have different wounds and a number are lame, and among these several are unable to take care of basic bodily function properly and who, as a result, need to be changed several times a day.)<sup>44</sup> Only two other hospices in Ghent were mentioned in the demographic sources. One deaf person, Adolphe Cocquyt, resided for four years in a hospice of the Little Sisters of the Poor in Maagdestraat. Frederic Ryckbosch lived and worked as a tailor for 38 years in the *Hospice Van Caneghem*, managed by the Brothers of Charity. This hospice was located in the Bijloke and was intended for blind persons. As Frederic was not blind, we can assume that the Brothers of Charity offered him a job at the hospice after his graduation from the deaf school.

The median age at which deaf men and women entered a hospice in Ghent was considerably lower than the overall average age at hospice admission (41): respectively 27 for

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<sup>42</sup> Dambruyne, J. (2002) *Corporatieve middengroepen: aspiraties, relaties en transformaties in de 16<sup>e</sup>-eeuwse Gentse ambachtswereld*. Ghent: Academia Press, 99.

<sup>43</sup> Steyaert, J.J. (1857) *Volledige beschrijving van Gent*, 137.

<sup>44</sup> Triest, P.J. (1821) *Brief 1104*. Ghent: Archive of the Sisters of Charity.

the men and 24 for the women. These young ages at hospice admission suggest that most deaf men and women entered a hospice shortly after their graduation in the deaf school. In Chapter 4 (section 4.4), I showed that 33.8 percent of the men who attended a deaf school, compared to 20 percent of the uneducated men, were institutionalized later in life. It seems that living in an institutional context as a child somewhat facilitated institutionalization as an adult. The fact that the Brothers and Sisters of Charity managed both the deaf schools and the hospices for disabled adults probably facilitated the transition from one institution to the other. The unique presence of a school for deaf boys and girls in Ghent may therefore account for the young average age at hospice admission in Ghent. Although institutionalization in a hospice was most often permanent, six deaf individuals left the hospice to enter a more specialized institution: a mental institution.

### **Mental institutions**

Mental institutions were much like hospices in the sense that they provided assistance on a long-term basis. However, they were different in two ways. First, they focused on a specific group of people, namely people with a mental illness. Second, in contrast to hospices, attempts were made to ‘treat’ residents – at least from the nineteenth century onwards. Mental asylums united people with various conditions, such as epilepsy, dementia in old age, alcoholism, intellectual disability and addictions.<sup>45</sup> In Belgium, the general concept of “*aliéné*” (estranged person) was used to specify the segregated position of those considered by society to be mentally ill – hence mental institutions were commonly referred to “*asiles d’aliénés*”. In popular speech, however, the term ‘*zothuis*’ (madhouse) was commonly used.

It is interesting to find that 17 percent of the institutionalized deaf men and women (N=11) resided in a mental institution, as did two of the siblings. The reason for the asylum admission of the deaf people is difficult to assess. Were they institutionalized due to an actual intellectual impairment or was their institutionalization the result of their deafness? For a long time, deaf people were perceived to be intellectually backward, hence the frequently used term ‘deaf and dumb’. However, by the nineteenth century this idea had lost much of its power, mainly due to the success of the deaf schools (see introduction). As 8 of the 11 deaf persons in a mental institution had graduated from a deaf school, the presence of a congenital intellectual impairment seems unlikely.<sup>46</sup> In fact, if a pupil was considered ‘idiotic’ or somehow unable to be educated, he or she was

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<sup>45</sup> Godderis, J. (1998) “De geesteszieken: nieuwe inzichten en instellingszorg”, 58.

<sup>46</sup> For three of the individuals it is unknown whether they were educated at a deaf school. The population registers had no record of them residing at the addresses of the schools for deaf girls and boys in Ghent.

sent away from the deaf school (2.1.1.4). An unpublished study of a nineteenth-century mental institution in Ghent gives an indication of the motives for institutionalization of the deaf. From 1850 onwards, the Sint-Jozef Asylum kept medical records for each individual patient, which specified the origin of a mental condition. These registers imply that several deaf-mute and blind patients were admitted because “they were intellectually disabled due to their sensory impairments”.<sup>47</sup> This suggests that the perception of the deaf as being deaf and dumb still prevailed in the nineteenth century.

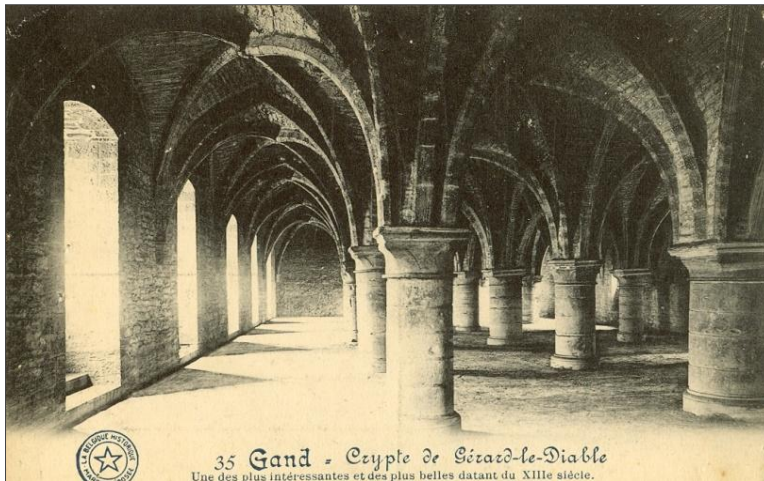
Apart from Alphonse Van Goethem and Marie Lousie Meurant, who resided in institutions in respectively Zelzate and Bruges, all the deaf men and women resided in one of the two mental asylums in Ghent. Initially, there had been three mental institutions in the city of Ghent. Men resided in the *Mansweezenhuys* (men’s orphanage) in the dungeons of the Geraard de Duivelsteen castle (figure 7.2). Women lived in the *Weesenuys* (orphanage), also called Hospice Number 8 in Korte Violettenstraat. Both institutions were initially managed by lay people. The third institution *Sint-Jans-ten-Dullen*, founded in 1181, was managed by the Alexian Brothers. However, the latter institution was abolished under the French government in 1798. The miserable living conditions in the two laic institutions spurred Petrus Jozef Triest in 1808 to assign both institutions to the care of the Brothers and Sisters of Charity. The religious personnel, joined by the physician and psychiatrist Jozef Guislain (1797-1860) in 1828, aimed at a more humane and medical treatment of the male and female residents in both institutions. In 1828 the male residents moved from the Gerard de Duivelsteen castle to the Alexian monastery. In 1851, Guislain persuaded the city council of Ghent to build a new institution for men. The new institution opened its doors in 1857 under the name *Het Gesticht der Krankzinnige Mans aan de Brugse Poort* (The Asylum for Insane Men at Bruges Gate). After the death of Guislain in 1860 it was renamed *Hospice Guislain*. From its establishment, the Brothers of Charity managed the institution and were responsible for the care of the patients. The female institution, called Sint-Jozef Asylum from 1808, remained in Korte Violettenstraat until 1908, after which it moved to a newly built complex in the neighbouring town of Melle.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Vanoverschelde, V. (2008) *Tot herstel der krankheid van mijn zwakke geest is nodig. De psychiatrische praktijk in het Sint-Jozefshuis en het Maison de Santé te Gent door de Zusters van Liefde en Jozef Guislain (1808-1860)*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished master’s dissertation), 114.

<sup>48</sup> Psychiatrisch Centrum Caritas. “Historiek”, <<http://www.pccaritas.be/algemeen/historiek/lees-meer>>, consulted on 25/08/2014; Leeman, K., Marysse, F. & Demets J. (2008) *Terug naar de toekomst: 1808-1908-2008: 100 jaar psychiatrisch centrum Caritas: 200 jaar psychiatrische zorg door de Zusters van Liefde van J.M.* Ghent: Zusters van Liefde van Jezus en Maria; Porter, R. & Wright, D. (2003) *The Confinement of the Insane: International Perspectives, 1800-1965*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 65.

**Figure 7.2** Dungeons of the Geraard de Duivelsteen castle



Source: [www.fracarita.org](http://www.fracarita.org) (Site congregation of the Brothers of Charity)

A study by Vaast Vanoverschelde showed that female residents of the Sint-Jozef Asylum (1808-1880) were on average 43.8 years old when they entered the asylum, stayed there about 4.8 years and then either died (46 percent) or left the institution (54 percent) because they were considered cured, improved, irredeemable or because they were transferred to another institution. About half the patients left the asylum within a year of their admission. Vanoverschelde explained this high number of discharges by stating that many patients were considered incurable and were therefore transferred to, for example, an asylum for incurables.<sup>49</sup> The deaf research population does not comply with this pattern. On the one hand, the deaf men and women were much younger when they were institutionalized: 34.5 years old on average. On the other hand, 94 percent of the deaf people never did leave the mental institution. Consequently they spent about 32.6 years on average in the institutions. The fact that the deaf residents were not discharged because of ‘incurability’ may imply that the medical personnel in the institution believed that either the deafness could be cured, or that the deaf person could at least overcome the intellectual disadvantages caused by their deafness.

### Homes for the elderly

Finally, the last type of institutions in which deaf people resided were homes for the elderly. Homes for elderly people were a type of hospice, but particularly intended for people in old age.<sup>50</sup> About 8 percent of the deaf and 23 percent of the siblings spent their

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<sup>49</sup> Vanoverschelde, V. (2008) *Tot herstel der krankheid van mijn zwakke geest is nodig*.

<sup>50</sup> S. Burch described the existence of homes in the US, particularly intended for elderly deaf persons. Burch, S. (2002) *Signs of Resistance. American Deaf Cultural History, 1900 to World War II*. New York/London: New York University Press, 83-8. In Flanders, I found no evidence of the existence of such homes for the elderly.

old age in a retirement home. The low institutionalization rate among the deaf is probably related to the fact that deaf individuals were more likely to enter an institution at a younger age and remain in that same institution, also in old age. The siblings, on the other hand, usually only entered an institution at the end of their lives, which makes it more likely that they entered a hospice for aged people.

It is unclear whether there was a general age requirement for residents, but according to the *Volledige beschrijving van Gent* (1857), persons had to be at least 70 to be admitted to the two homes for the elderly in Ghent.<sup>51</sup> The deaf and the siblings who entered a home for the elderly were respectively aged 66 (median 72) and 75 (median 73) at admission. The average age in the deaf cohort is lowered by three deaf persons who entered a hospice for old people at a particularly young age. Pelagie Van Beveren was only 55 years old when she entered a home for the elderly in her hometown of Sleidinge. Francois Van Der Eecken and Amelie Meersman were even younger as they were just in their forties when they were admitted to the hospices in respectively Haaltert and Zele. In the case of Amelie, institutionalization was probably a short-term solution as she left the hospice three years later to go and live in the household of her brother. Why these three deaf persons entered a home for the elderly at such a young age is difficult to say. The availability of different types of hospices was probably more limited in smaller municipalities, which may have necessitated some people entering a home for the elderly prematurely. Apart from these three individuals, all deaf individuals entered a home at a much older age and spent about two years in the elderly home before they died.

In exchange for housing and food, elderly residents had to comply with a certain regimen. Life in a home for the elderly was strictly regulated and residents lost much of their personal freedom.<sup>52</sup> The rule book of the *Hospice Ferdinand Lousbergs* (1865) gives an idea of what life was like in an institution for the elderly. According to the book, residents who were able to engage in paid employment could ask the director for permission to do this. However, if they were permitted to work, they had to hand over one-quarter of their earnings. Besides the paid employment, all residents were obliged to perform chores in the institution – except if a person was physically incapable. Besides these chores, residents had little in the way of distraction and entertainment. Residents could only leave the institution at fixed intervals and could only receive visitors on Thursday afternoons. All residents received a similar wardrobe at admission, which included a coat, a cardigan, a blue shirt and three pairs of trousers made of old linen or

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<sup>51</sup> Steyaert, J.J. (1857) *Volledige beschrijving van Gent*, 193.

<sup>52</sup> Segers, Y. (1998) “Het Sint-Jan Baptist Godsgasthuis in Boom: ‘eene shuytplaets voor armen en zieken’” In: De Maeyer, J. (ed.) *Er is leven voor de dood. Tweehonderd jaar gezondheidszorg in Vlaanderen*. Kapellen: Pelckmans, 91.

sheets, a pair of shoes and clogs. These items remained the property of the institution and were only replaced after a certain period of time. Residents who did not follow the rules could receive a punishment, ranging from a reprimand to dismissal from the institution.<sup>53</sup>

To sum up, deaf individuals could be found in a wide range of institutions. These institutions each had their own characteristics, but also shared some common features. The vast majority of residents in all the institutions were people unable to provide for themselves due to poverty, illness, impairment or old age. Although the institutions were not exclusively intended for the poor, except perhaps the poorhouses, most residents apparently belonged to the poorer strata in society. In most cases, their admission was therefore probably instigated and paid for by authorities such as the Commission of Civil Hospices. Although every institution was based on philanthropic intentions, actual living conditions were probably harsh as “*the personal identity of an individual within a custodial environment was suppressed by the greater needs of the institution and its personnel.*”<sup>54</sup> It seems therefore likely that many persons entered an institution involuntarily, forced by unfavourable living circumstances or by the decision of family members, friends, or philanthropically minded people.

In an attempt to uncover the reasons for institutionalization, the next section looks into the personal characteristics of people who did and did not enter an institution. Can we identify certain characteristics that were more likely to lead to institutionalization, such as the presence of an impairment, or otherwise curbed the likelihood of institutional living, such as having a spouse and children? Looking into the life courses of people *before* institutionalization can shed some light on the extent to which institutional living was the result of individual agency and/or a circumstantial necessity.

### 7.2.3 Life before admission

The study of the household composition trajectories (6.2.3) left us with the impression that institutionalization was a ‘final’ survival strategy. A person was likely to enter an institution only when they had no close relatives to turn to or when relatives were too old to take in a family member. Nonetheless, several deaf men and women entered an institution while they still had living parents and/or siblings. In this case, family members may have been reluctant to take in a deaf relative, perhaps out of economic consid-

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<sup>53</sup> (1865) *Hospice Ferdinand Lousbergs à Gand. Règlement 1865*. Ghent: Gyselynck.

<sup>54</sup> Hutchison, I. (2007) *A History of Disability in Nineteenth-Century Scotland*, 236.

erations, or individuals may have actively chosen to enter an institution.<sup>55</sup> However, we can assume that characteristics other than the presence of family and personal decision-making alone determined whether a person was institutionalized. Factors such as a person's gender, living environment and whether one had a remunerative occupation may have affected institutionalization as well. By the use of event history models, this section aims to uncover some of the variables that influenced the probability of a person being institutionalized. In other words, the models explore the personal characteristics that influenced whether a person was institutionalized or never entered an institution.

The analysis is based on Cox regression methods (see 2.2.1.3). This event history approach allows one to take into account a large number of covariates and the duration of an event – in this case, the age at which a person entered an institution for the first time. The regression assumes a binary outcome: either a person was institutionalized during the period of observation (1), or they were not (0). The period during which a person lived in an institution, whether it was a couple of months or the larger part of their life course, is not considered. However, persons who only died in an institution are not counted as having been institutionalized. In practice, this implies that individuals who only died in a hospital, and did not enter an institution before that time, were counted as 0.<sup>56</sup> The decision to exclude hospitalized individuals from the analysis results from the observation that in the second half of the nineteenth-century it became more common to die in a hospital, regardless of a person's socio-economic background. Thus, the analysis only looks into the variables affecting long-term institutionalization. As a result, the number of hearing siblings who were institutionalized shrank from 39 to 20 persons, the number of institutionalized deaf persons from 93 to 79 individuals. Individuals are followed from the age of 16 until the moment they enter an institution for the first time, or if they were never institutionalized, until they die or migrate out of East Flanders.

Although the Cox models provide an indication of the characteristics that influenced institutionalization, they cannot fully explain why some individuals spent part of their lives in an institution and others did not. For that purpose, we need information that is

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<sup>55</sup> In 6.2.3.3. I found that institutionalization occurred more often in the linen districts of Ghent and Oude-naarde in particular. I have suggested that the higher institutionalization rate in these districts may have been related to either the proximity of institutions in Ghent or the linen-orientated character of both districts. In a period in which the linen industry was in decline, it may have been financially easier to enter a deaf son or daughter in an institution.

<sup>56</sup> The three deaf individuals for whom population registers indicated that they were domiciled in the hospital were considered institutionalized because of their prolonged stay.

often unavailable and, moreover, impossible to convert into quantitative data. In this regard, I can mention the importance of personal and family-related motives, social pressures and public opinion on institutionalization.

### **Variables of interest**

Based on the information available in the population and civil registers, I can test the influence of a wide array of covariates on the probability of institutionalization.

- *Disability and birth cohort* - The readiest variables to test are the presence of a disability and the development through time (birth cohort). In line with the observations in the descriptive analyses, I expect a higher likelihood for deaf individuals to be institutionalized, especially in the industrial cohort (born 1830-1860). The propensity to enter an institution was presumably higher for the siblings in the second half of the nineteenth century as well, but still substantially lower compared to their deaf brothers and sisters.
- *Gender* - In the discussion of poor relief systems (section 4.5) I stated that more than half the registered poor were female - especially single mothers and widows. Moreover, women were more likely to be unemployed and to earn less than men. This higher economic uncertainty for women may have resulted in a higher likelihood for women to end up in an institution. On the other hand, it was more common for women to adopt the role of caretakers for relatives. Therefore, co-residence with family members may have been a more common trajectory for women than institutionalization. To test these assumptions, the covariate gender is included in the analysis. Men are considered the reference group in relation to women.
- *Living environment* - In the middle of the nineteenth century, Belgium had 404 care facilities, of which about half were situated in Flanders.<sup>57</sup> Cities housed a larger number of institutions, which were often more specialized, while institutions in smaller villages were less common and more varied in their residents.<sup>58</sup> Did the higher prevalence of institutions in urban regions result in a higher institutionalization rate in cities compared to the countryside? According to Lynn Hollen Lees, confinement to institutions was indeed a more likely event for disabled and elderly paupers in urban areas compared to rural ones.<sup>59</sup> By distinguishing between people born in a rural (reference category) and urban setting, I test the influence of a person's *living environment*.

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<sup>57</sup> Segers, Y. (1998) "Het Sint-Jan Baptist Godsgasthuis in Boom", 83.

<sup>58</sup> van Heijst, A., Derks M. & Monteiore M.E. (2010) *Ex caritate*, 329.

<sup>59</sup> Lees, L.H. (1998) *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 69.



- *Number of siblings* – Furthermore, in line with the observations in the previous chapter, I assume that a person was less likely to enter an institution if they had a large number of relatives to fall back on. I incorporate the number of siblings a person had according to three categories: those who were only children (reference category), persons with 1 to 4 siblings, and persons with more than 4 siblings.
- *Age at losing both parents* – I include the age at which a person lost both parents. Again there are three categories: below the age of 30 (reference category), between the 30<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, and over 50. The assumption is that a person who lost their parents at a younger age was more likely to be institutionalized in life.
- *Civil status* – Based on similar considerations, the covariate civil status examines whether persons who were unmarried or widowed – thus who were ‘alone’ – were more likely to enter an institution than persons with a spouse. Individuals who were married are assumed to have been more likely to spend their lives outside institutional walls.
- *Socio-economic status* – The discussion in 7.2.2 suggested that individuals living in poverty were more often institutionalized. An important explanation for their higher institutionalization is that legislation required local authorities to pay for the maintenance costs of the poor. People with impairments were, as a special category, entitled to support regardless of their financial situation. Nonetheless, we can assume that poor deaf people were still more likely to enter an institution than deaf people able to provide for their livelihood. The analysis of the state of indigence of the research population (4.5) showed that the level of poverty of the deaf and sibling cohorts is mainly unknown. Only the *Staat van alle de stomme-dooven welke zig bevinden in de provincie Oost-Vlaanderen* (1821) and the individual bulletins (1858) sometimes specified whether a deaf person was indigent at the moment of registration. To gain insight into the socio-economic status of a larger number of research individuals, I therefore use their occupational careers as an indication. For every person, I determined the occupation that was most often registered in the civil and population registers. If different occupations were equally frequent, the occupation with the highest SOCP0 classification was selected.<sup>60</sup> Based on the most common occupation, I have classified the research population into three socio-economic groups: people who were mostly unskilled or jobless (reference category), (semi-)skilled workers and middle class workers. The likelihood of a person entering an institution is assumed to decrease as their socio-economic status increases. Although a person’s occupation

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<sup>60</sup> See 4.3.2. For more information on the SOCP0 classification scheme and the occupations belonging to each category, see the appendix.

cannot fully express their state of indigence, this covariate can provide us with an indication of the importance of socio-economic status.

- *Schooling* – A final covariate that I assume may have affected a person’s likelihood of entering an institution, at least for deaf individuals, is schooling. In the previous paragraph, I argued how the transition from a deaf school to an adult institution was probably easily made. However, the lack of educational information for the first cohort and the discrepancy in the number of educated and uneducated deaf people in the second cohort ultimately hindered the inclusion of this covariate in the analysis.

The tables reporting the results of the Cox regressions list *hazard ratios*, *p-values* and *distribution ratios*. The hazard ratios enable to assess the risk of experiencing an event compared to the reference category. The reference category (ref.) has a hazard ratio equal to 1. Values lower than 1 are associated with lower risks of experiencing the event of interest compared to the reference group, and vice versa for higher values. The *p-value* column indicates the statistical significance of the hazard ratios. A value lower than 0.1 is considered *moderately significant*, a value lower than 0.05 is *significant* and a value lower than 0.01 is *highly significant*. Hazard ratios with a significant p-value are indicated in bold. The *distribution* indicates the representation of each subcategory within the category as a whole (100 percent).

## Results

Tables 7.3 and 7.4 present the results of the Cox regression models of the probability of long-term institutionalization. Table 7.3 comprises two models: one for the deaf population younger than 60 (model 1) and one for the population of deaf and hearing individuals below 60 (model 2). I included no separate model for the siblings as only two siblings were long-term institutionalized before the age of 60. Joannes Hoste died in the military hospital of Groningen after being hospitalized for two months. His institutionalization followed naturally from the fact that he became ill during his military service. Petrus Van Breusegem, on the other hand, had spent over ten years in a mental institution in Zelzate when he died at the age of 51. It is uncertain whether Petrus resided in the institution as a patient or as an employee: in his death certificate in 1891, he was registered as a servant.

Table 7.4 presents the results for the deaf (model 1), hearing (model 2) and total population (model 3) older than 60. Cox regressions assume that the effects of covariates remain unchanged during the whole period under observation. In other words, the impact of for example a person’s gender, number of siblings or the age at which they lost their parents on the probability of being institutionalized is expected to be proportional over the life course. However, in real terms it seems unlikely that the death of one’s parents was as influential on institutionalization in old age as in the period shortly after their death. The division at age 60 was made to somewhat adjust for these non-

proportionality issues. We can indeed assume that covariates had a different impact on the institutionalization of young and middle-aged persons and elderly persons.

Besides regression models, I also use Nelson-Aalen cumulative hazard estimates to illustrate the impact of covariates. Nelson-Aalen cumulative hazard estimates are graphs that estimate the cumulative number of expected events – in this case institutionalization. The higher the curve, the more individuals who experienced institutionalization.<sup>61</sup>

**Table 7.3** Cox regression of the probability of long-term institutionalization, <60 years old

	<i>Model 1: Deaf</i>			<i>Model 2: All</i>		
	<i>Hazard ratio</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Distribution (%)</i>	<i>Hazard ratio</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Distribution (%)</i>
<i>Disability</i>					0.000	
Sibling (ref.)	-	-		1		51.3
Deaf	-	-		<b>22.367</b>	0.000	48.7
<i>Birth cohort</i>		0.000			0.000	
Cohort 1 (ref.)	1		51.1	1		52.1
Cohort 2	<b>4.546</b>	0.000	48.9	<b>4.977</b>	0.000	47.9
<i>Living environment</i>		0.000			0.000	
Rural (ref.)	1		60.4	1		63.5
Urban	<b>4.972</b>	0.000	39.6	<b>4.729</b>	0.000	36.5
<i>Siblings</i>		0.429			0.370	
Only child (ref.)	1		21.2	1		16.8
1-4 siblings	<b>0.482</b>	0.049	45	<b>0.537</b>	0.083	46.5
>4 siblings	0.703	0.332	33.8	0.682	0.294	36.7
<i>Gender</i>		0.352			0.529	
Men (ref.)	1		58.8	1		56.8
Women	1.300	0.380	41.2	1.186	0.558	43.2
	N individuals: 260 N institutions: 47 Time at risk: 7901.28 Log likelihood: -216.661 Prob > chi2: 0.0000			N individuals: 507 N institutions: 49 Time at risk: 16007.23 Log likelihood: -234.625 Prob > chi2: 0.0000		

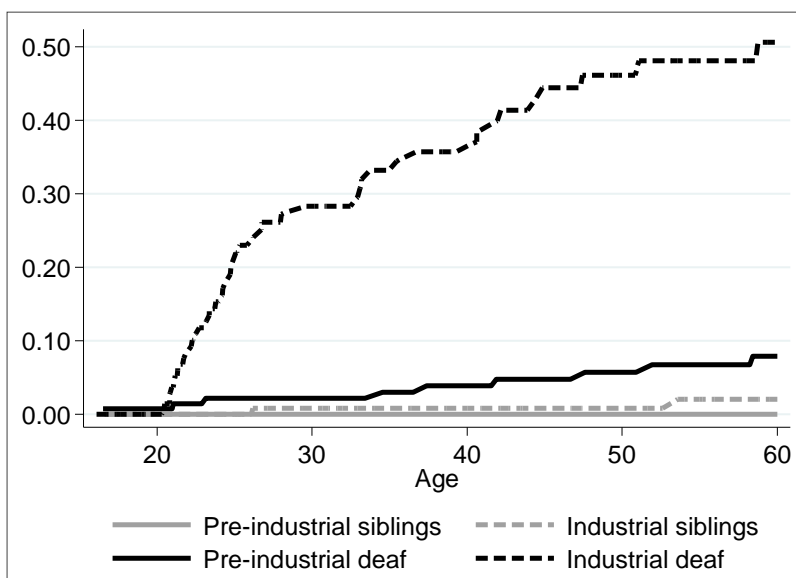
Table 7.3 shows that entering an institution before the age of 60 was significantly more likely for people who were deaf, who were born in the second birth cohort and in the city. These observations are consistent with my assumptions. Deaf persons were about

<sup>61</sup> Nelson-Aalen cumulative hazard estimates can be understood as inverse Kaplan Meier graphs. While Kaplan Meier graphs start at 1.00 and decrease each time the event takes place, Nelson-Aalen graphs start at 0 and increase each time a research person experiences the event.

22 times more likely to be institutionalized before their 60<sup>th</sup> birthday compared to their siblings. To illustrate the effect of birth cohort more clearly, figure 7.3 shows the Nelson-Aalen estimates of survival functions: the portion of the population that did experience institutionalization over time, according to birth cohort.

Figure 7.3 shows that differences between the deaf and the siblings were particularly strong in the industrial cohort. In the pre-industrial period (born before 1810) the differences between the deaf and sibling curves (solid lines) were quite small, although deaf individuals were already more likely to be institutionalized. In the industrial period (born between 1830 and 1860) the curves of the two research groups (dotted lines) diverged greatly. Whereas the difference between the pre-industrial and industrial deaf (dark lines) was very large, the difference between the siblings in both birth cohorts (light lines) was rather limited. This suggests that deaf men and women were much more affected by nineteenth-century institutionalization processes than hearing persons.

**Figure 7.3** Cumulative hazard survival estimates for the probability of long-term institutionalization (<60 years old), by disability and cohort



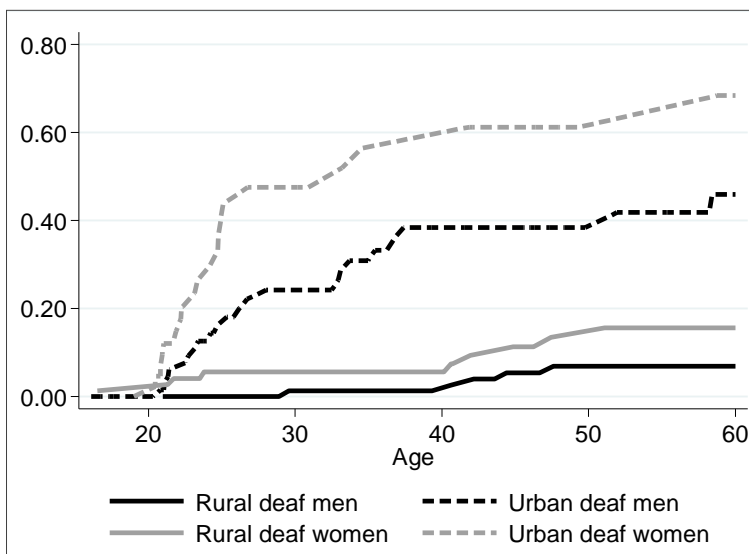
Source: MS Access database, research individual file

The higher number of institutions in the second time period and in the cities probably contributed to the higher probability of institutionalization in these categories. On the other hand, it may have been more customary for deaf people to be institutionalized in the nineteenth century, alongside the development of deaf schools – which was predominantly an urban phenomenon.

The hazard ratios for the covariate *gender* suggest that deaf women were 30 percent more likely to enter an institution, but research on a larger sample is required to obtain significant results. Figure 7.4 presents the cumulative hazard survival estimates for the probability of long-term institutionalization of the deaf (<60 years old), by living envi-

ronment and gender. The higher the curve, the higher the chance of institutionalization. Thus, the probability of institutionalization was highest among urban deaf women and lowest among rural deaf men. While the difference between deaf men and women was relatively limited in the countryside, the differences between the sexes were more pronounced in the cities: the solid lines (rural) are situated closer together than the dashed lines (urban).

**Figure 7.4** Cumulative hazard survival estimates for the probability of long-term institutionalization of the deaf (<60 years old), by living environment and gender

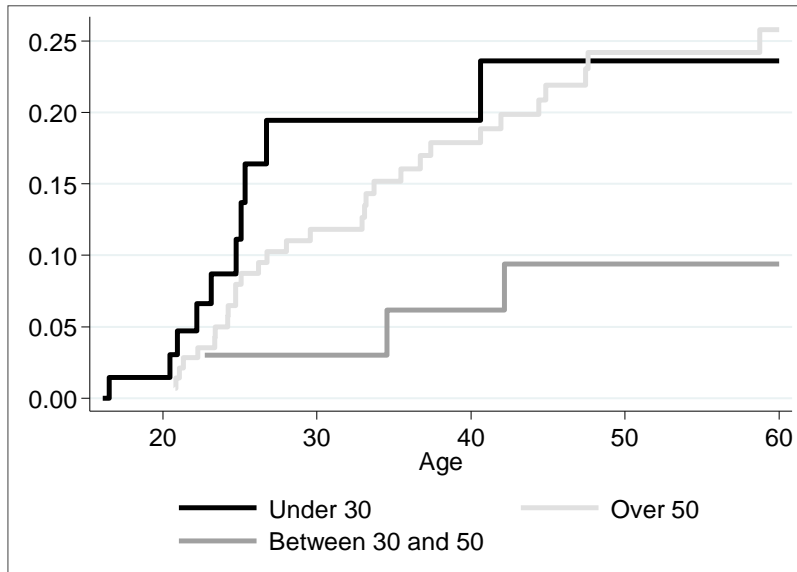


Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Regarding the number of siblings, table 7.3 points to a lower institutionalization propensity among the individuals with siblings (moderately significant for those with 1 to 4 siblings), compared to only children. Having siblings thus lowered a person's chances of entering an institution. Civil status was not included in the final models as all the persons who entered an institution were unmarried. This confirms that marriage was an important brake on institutionalization.

The age at which a person lost their parents was also not included due to the insignificance of the hazard ratios. However, the Nelson-Aalen cumulative hazard survival estimates (figure 7.5) suggest that institutionalization before the age of 60 was higher among deaf individuals who lost their parents before the age of 30: the dark line is situated at the top. If a person lost their parents after the age of 30, the effect is less clear. The light gray line represents individuals who lost their parents after their 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. The sharpest increase in this curve takes place before the age of 50. Thus, these individuals were institutionalized when their parents were still alive. The mid-gray line represents individuals who lost both parents between the ages of 30 and 50. Institutionalization was apparently lower among persons who lost their parents between their 30<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> birthday than among persons who lost their parents after their 50<sup>th</sup> birthday.

**Figure 7.5** Cumulative hazard survival estimates for the probability of long-term institutionalization of the deaf (<60 years old), by age at which both parents were dead

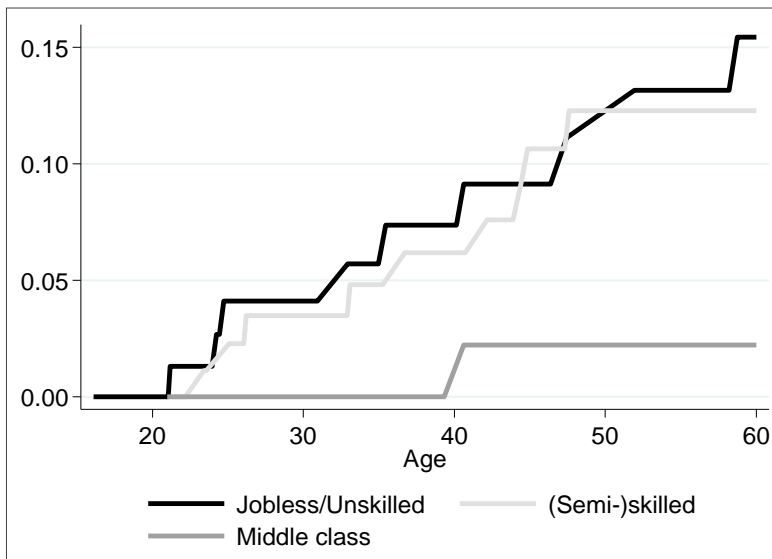


Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Finally, the impact of a person's socio-economic status (SES) is shown in figure 7.6.<sup>62</sup> The figure presents the cumulative hazard survival estimates for the probability of long-term institutionalization of the deaf (<60 years old), according to socio-economic status. The Nelson-Aalen cumulative hazards indicate that middle class men and women were the least likely to enter an institution since the curve is situated at the bottom. The curves of the unskilled/jobless individuals and (semi-)skilled individuals are more intertwined, but at most ages people without or with a low-paid occupation ruled the roost with regard to institutionalization. This pattern confirms my assumption that poorer people in particular were more likely to end up in an institution.

<sup>62</sup> The age at which an individual lost both parents and SES were insignificant in the Cox regression models. The more covariates that are taken into account, the more the data sample is split up into small-sized categories. Therefore, the results are more likely to be insignificant. For this reason, I have chosen not to include all the covariates in the final model. The insignificance of the results does not necessarily imply that the variables are of no importance, but indicates that research on a larger sample is necessary. Nelson-Aalen estimates illustrate the effects of the covariates.

**Figure 7.6** Cumulative hazard survival estimates for the probability of long-term institutionalization of the deaf (<60 years old), by SES



Source: MS Access database, research individual file

The likelihood of a person entering an institution before the age of 60 was undoubtedly determined by various personal and environmental characteristics. In the event history analyses above, I have identified some of the covariates that influenced institutionalization. In short, institutionalization was more likely if a person was deaf, born in the mid-nineteenth century, female and living in the city. In addition, individuals were more likely to enter an institution if they were an only child, unmarried and had lost their parents before their 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. However, having living parents was no guarantee of escaping institutionalization. Individuals without employment or employed in unskilled occupations were especially more likely to enter an institution.

Table 7.4 presents the results of the Cox regressions of the probability of long-term institutionalization for individuals aged over 60. Model 1 presents the results for the deaf population, model 2 for the sibling population and model 3 for the total deaf and hearing population.

**Table 7.4** Cox regression of the probability of long-term institutionalization, above 60 years

	Model 1: Deaf			Model 2: Siblings			Model 3: All		
	Hazard ratio	p-value	Distribution(%)	Hazard ratio	p-value	Distribution(%)	Hazard ratio	p-value	Distribution(%)
<i>Disability</i>									
Sibling (ref.)	-	-	0	-	-	100	1	0.736	54.8
Deaf	-	-	100	-	-	0	0.963	0.915	45.2
<i>Birth cohort</i>									
Cohort 1 (ref.)	1	0.668	68.1	1	0.510	48.9	1	0.421	57.6
Cohort 2	1.079	0.870	31.9	1.123	0.839	51.1	1.062	0.864	42.4
<i>Region</i>									
Rural (ref.)	1	0.009	69.9	1	0.186	71.5	1	0.003	70.8
Urban	<b>2.865</b>	0.025	30.1	1.883	0.214	28.5	<b>2.362</b>	0.010	29.2
<i>Civil status</i>									
Alone (ref.)	1	0.280	86.7	1	0.098	63.5	1	0.062	74
Married	0.332	0.294	13.3	0.366	0.191	36.5	<b>0.357</b>	0.094	26
<i>Gender</i>									
Men (ref.)	1	0.022	57.5	1	0.011	48.1	1	0.001	52.4
Women	<b>0.283</b>	0.021	42.5	<b>0.282</b>	0.020	51.9	<b>0.275</b>	0.001	47.6
<i>SES</i>									
Jobless/unskilled (ref.)	1	0.190	36.3	1	0.022	29.9	1	0.009	32.8
(Semi-)skilled	0.990	0.983	38	1.249	0.675	28.5	1.163	0.663	32.8
Middle Class	0.271	0.123	25.7	<b>0.075</b>	0.021	41.6	<b>0.140</b>	0.003	34.4
	N individuals: 113 N institution: 21 Time at risk: 1443.19 Log likelihood: -72.437 Prob > chi2: 0.0100			N individuals: 137 N institution: 18 Time at risk: 1840.84 Log likelihood: -56.437 Prob > chi2: 0.0002			N individuals: 250 N institution: 39 Time at risk: 3284.03 Log likelihood: -153.974 Prob > chi2: 0.0000		



In old age, the differences in the hazard ratios between the deaf and the siblings and between the subcategories of the other covariates were smaller. As most of the deaf individuals had entered an institution before their 60<sup>th</sup> birthday and most siblings only did so after 60, the number of deaf and hearing individuals that entered an institution in old age was more similar. Hence, the small difference in the hazard ratios (and the insignificant p-value) of the covariate *disability*.<sup>63</sup>

A similar reason explains why the sex ratio reversed in favour of a higher institutionalization rate for men: women were more likely to enter an institution at a younger age. As a result, there were fewer women 'left' to enter an institution in old age. This explains the higher propensity of elderly men to enter an institution. However, the total percentage of institutionalized men (17 percent) and women (18 percent) across all ages shows that in the end, despite the fact that women and men entered an institution at different phases in life, a similar percentage entered an institution.

Similar to the results in table 7.3, individuals born in the industrial cohort and living in the city were more often institutionalized.<sup>64</sup> However, the differences with the pre-industrial cohort and countryside were much less substantial. People in the industrial cohort were a mere 6 percent more likely to be institutionalized than those born in the pre-industrial period. The fact that the majority of those born in the pre-industrial cohort reached old age in the mid-nineteenth century, at a time when institutionalization was already more frequent, probably accounts for the small difference between the two cohorts.<sup>65</sup> Cumulative hazard survival estimates (figure 7.7) illustrate how the differences according to research group and birth cohort were limited.

People born in the city were twice as likely to enter an institution compared to people born in the countryside – before reaching 60 city-born people had been five times more likely to enter an institution. The smaller difference in old age suggests that rural areas had a better developed care industry for people in old age, which in turn resulted in a higher rate of institutionalization (and thus a smaller difference with the cities).

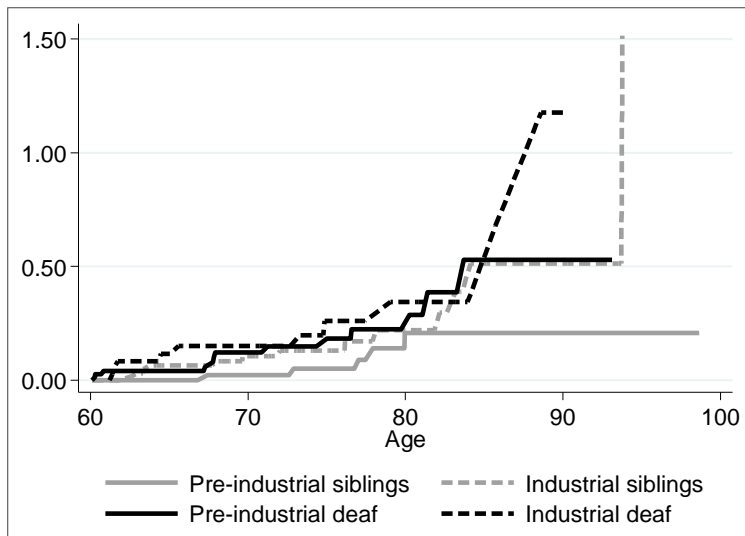
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<sup>63</sup> Regardless of the moment of first admission, many more deaf individuals spent old age in an institution. Indeed, paragraph 7.2.1 showed that institutionalization was usually for life. Thus, those who had entered an institution before the age of 60 were most likely still in an institution after the age of 60. However, table 7.4 only counts those men and women who *entered* an institution.

<sup>64</sup> Only region was moderately significant and only in the deaf cohort.

<sup>65</sup> Individuals born in the pre-industrial cohort (about 1750-1810) turned 60 in 1810 at the earliest, 1870 at the latest. Individuals born in the industrial cohort (1830-1860) reached 60 between 1890 and 1920.

**Figure 7.7** Cumulative hazard survival estimates for the probability of long-term institutionalization (>60 years old), by disability and cohort

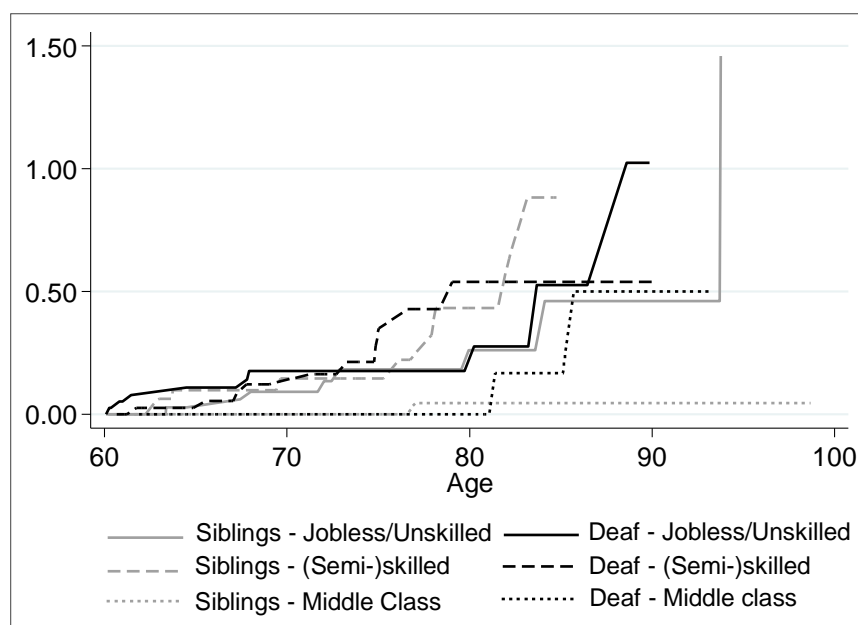


Source: MS Access database, research individual file

The *number of siblings* or the *age at losing both parents* were of insignificant importance in old age. This is less of a surprise as the majority of the elderly people – institutionalized or not – had lost both their parents and had fewer siblings to fall back on. *Civil status* was of importance, but only significantly in the sibling cohort. The insignificance within the deaf cohort is probably the result of the low number of married deaf people. Nonetheless, in both cohorts institutionalization was more frequent among unmarried and widowed individuals.

Figure 7.8 presents the cumulative hazard survival estimates for the probability of long-term institutionalization of the deaf (>60 years old), according to socio-economic status. The distinction according to socio-economic status shows that, once again, middle class individuals (dotted lines) had the lowest institutionalization risk. The differences between the unskilled/jobless (solid lines) and (semi-)skilled (dashed lines) are limited. This probably relates to the fact that the occupation recorded the most does not reflect the actual economic situation of many elderly people. Regardless of their occupation in life, most elderly people were unemployed. Except for those who had saved up money during their lives or had property (as many of the middle class workers did), most elderly people were dependent on some kind of support – from children, poor relief or institutions. A person’s occupational career was thus of less importance in old age, which may explain the entanglement of the curves in figure 7.8.

**Figure 7.8** Cumulative hazard survival estimates for the probability of long-term institutionalization (>60 years old), by disability and SES



Source: MS Access database, research individual file

I have used event history analyses to show that a person's living conditions, such as their living environment, occupation, civil status and the presence of close relatives, determined their likelihood of being institutionalized, especially at a younger age. For those reaching old age in the nineteenth century, it became more common for a larger proportion of people to enter an institution. Therefore, the differences according to disability, living environment and socio-economic status were somewhat mitigated.

Besides these circumstantial factors, other more personal factors probably influenced institutionalization as well. Yet, the impact of personal *agency* and decision-making is more difficult to measure by quantitative means. Moreover, sources reporting the experiences of institutionalization are rare – let alone the experiences of persons with disabilities. Taking into account the fact that institutions restricted one's movement and personal freedom in an atmosphere of surveillance and regulation, it is doubtful, according to Hutchison, that the residents of an institution were inclined to see it as the commonly portrayed place of refuge and care. He therefore concludes that entering an institution was rarely by choice.<sup>66</sup> A unique set of ten letters by the priest-poet Domien Gracco, written during his confinement to the mental institution of the Brothers of Charity in Ghent between 1855 and 1860, reveals his abhorrence of institutional life. On December 15, 1855 he wrote in a letter to a friend: “*Al weer een jaer in de eeuwigheid*” (another year in eternity). Four months later, his despair was even deeper. On April 6, he

<sup>66</sup> Hutchison, I. (2007) *A History of Disability in Nineteenth-Century Scotland*, 225-6.

wrote: “O groote God, o goede God, alwijs, almogend Opperwezen, hoe zwaer weegt mij op’t hert mijn lot! Hoe hoog is mijne ramp gerezen? Ach, sta mij bij in mijnen nood opdat ik eindelijk niet bezwijkje” (O great God, o good God, all-wise, almighty Supreme Being, how is my heart troubled by my destiny! How terrible is my disaster? Oh, stand by me in my despair so that I shall not finally succumb).<sup>67</sup> These unique testimonies illustrate how living in an institution could be a bitter pill to swallow and was probably often done with reluctance. The question of how deaf people experienced the months and years they spent in an institution is difficult to answer. If the institution’s other residents and personnel were hearing and unable to communicate by sign language, life in an institution was presumably very lonely for deaf residents. Moreover, being neither necessarily ill nor intellectually impaired, they may have felt ‘out of place’ in hospitals and mental institutions. However, for those struggling to survive in society, entering an institution may have presented the lesser of two evils. The institution for deaf men in Ghent run by the Brothers of Charity may even have been an attractive option for deaf men – living together with fellow deaf persons.

#### 7.2.4 Life within institutional walls

Civil and population registers do not offer any insights into the daily experiences of people living in institutions. However, they do contain information about a person’s occupation at the moment he or she was registered at an institution. Therefore, it is possible to find out whether people were able to work in an institutional setting and in what types of occupation. Nonetheless, there are two difficulties with the analysis: potential *under-registration* and possible *over-registration* of employment. An examination of the population registers shows that clerks were more careless in the registration of the personal details of residents of an institution. In many cases, only the names and dates of birth are recorded, while the column for “occupation” is used to designate a person as “*vieillard*” (old person), “*aliéné*” (deranged), “*sourd-muet*” (deaf-mute) and so on, depending on the type of institution. The lack of recorded occupations does not necessarily imply that people in an institution could not be professionally active. In this regard, I have mentioned that elderly people in Hospice Lousbergs were allowed to have an occupation. However, the extent to which such an occupation was considered formal, full-time employment – and thus worth recording in population registers – is unclear.

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<sup>67</sup> Gracco, D. (1855) *Gedichten en brieven, geschreven tijdens zijn opsluiting in het gesticht Het Strop te Gent*. Ghent University: manuscript collection. For more information about Domien Gracco: Velghe, D. (1997) “Domien Gracco: An Introduction to a Nineteenth-Century Latin Poet” In: Ijsewijn, J. (ed.) *Humanistica Lovaniensia*. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 363-80.

On the other hand, when an occupation was recorded, it can be questioned whether the recorded occupation represented an occupation that was actually exercised inside the institution or one that the person had before entering the institution. For example, Adolphe Cocquyt spent the last four years of his life in an institution of the Sisters of the Poor in Ghent. At his admission to the institution in 1902, he was recorded as a “*landbouwersknecht*” (farm servant). His death certificate in 1906 stated he was “*zonder bedrijf*” (without occupation). Whether Adolphe continued to work as a farm worker on the grounds of the institution or whether he stopped his professional activities on entering the institution is unclear.

**Table 7.5** Occupational recordings for residents of an institution, in %

	Deaf		Siblings	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
<b>N=</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>13</b>
Agriculture	0.7	0	0	0
Unskilled labour	4.5	0.8	0	7.7
Crafts	0.7	0	0	0
Textile & Clothing	15.7	8.9	0	15.4
Domestic service	8.2	4.9	4.3	7.7
Other	0	0.8	4.3	0
Without occupation	26.2	27.7	34.9	38.4
Blank	44	56.9	56.5	30.8
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

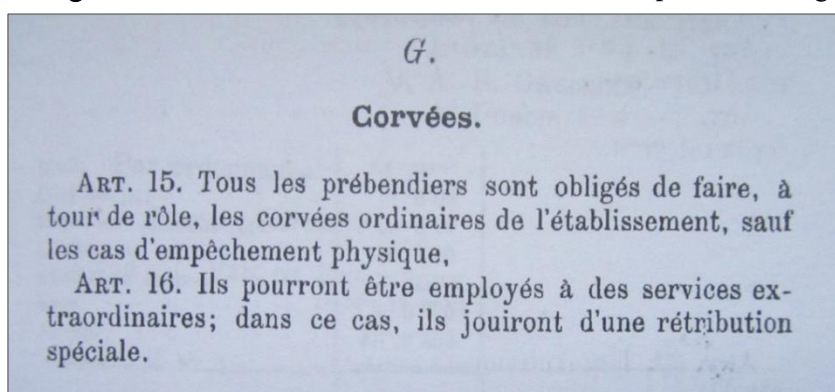
Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Table 7.5 presents the occupations registered in the civil and population registers for people residing in an institution. The occupations mentioned in the death certificates of individuals who only died in a hospital are not taken into account. In this case, it is obvious that the recorded occupation was not practised within the hospital, but in the period before hospitalization. Each occupational record is counted separately. In other words, if a person was registered multiple times in an institution, the blank space or occupation at each registration was counted. For example, Sophie Gyselinck was registered seven times at the Sint-Jozef Asylum. Between the ages of 24 and 69, she is recorded six times in the population registers of Ghent and once in her death certificate. When she was 41, Sophie was registered as a maidservant. At her death she was recorded as without occupation. In the five other records the population registers mentioned no occupation; only the word “*zinneloze*” (insane). In table 7.5 Sophie is counted seven times. Counting only ‘unique’ occupations would result in her single registration as a maidservant being given an equal value to the absence of an occupation (five

times). By counting all the records individually, table 7.5 provides a more accurate picture of the institutional employment pattern.

Table 7.5 indicates that for the majority of men and women, living in an institution probably implied the end of their formal occupational career: most individuals had either no registered occupation (blank) or were registered as without occupation. It is difficult to make assumptions about their informal activities. The residents of an institution were probably expected to contribute their bit to the running of the institution, if they were capable. In this regard, the rule book of Hospice Lousbergs stated that residents were given household chores (figure 7.9). Indeed, several studies report that residents were mobilized to help with the everyday management of the institutions.<sup>68</sup> In this way, the institutions wanted to present themselves as an alternative home for their residents.<sup>69</sup>

**Figure 7.9** Extract from the rule book of Hospice Lousbergs (1865)<sup>70</sup>



Source: *Hospice Ferdinand Lousbergs à Gand. Règlement 1865*. Ghent: Gyselynck.

Of those with a registered occupation, the majority worked in textile and clothing manufacturing: men were primarily recorded as tailors, women as seamstresses. These types of occupations were easy to perform within the walls of the institution and probably had a practical purpose: mending and producing clothing for the institution's resi-

<sup>68</sup> See for example: Coolens, E. (1998) "Het Lousbergsgesticht: een stedelijk rusthuis in het industriële Gent" In: De Maeyer, J. (ed.) *Er is leven voor de dood. Tweehonderd jaar gezondheidszorg in Vlaanderen*. Kapellen: Pelckmans, 94-6. The chapter "Patients' Labour" In: Reaume, G. (2000) *Remembrance of Patients Past: Patient Life at the Toronto Hospital for the Insane, 1870-1940*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 133-80. The chapter "Education and Building Character" In: Hacsí, T.A. (1997) *Second Home: Orphan Asylums and Poor Families in America*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 173-95.

<sup>69</sup> Barile K.S. & Brandon J.C. (2004) *Household Chores and Household Choices: Theorizing the Domestic Sphere in Historical Archaeology*. Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 246.

<sup>70</sup> Translation: Chores. ART. 15. All residents are obliged to do, by turns, the ordinary chores of the institution, except in cases of physical impediment. ART 16. They can be employed for special services; in that case, they receive a special compensation.

dents. It is unclear whether residents were paid – and if so how much – for their work within the institution. 11 deaf individuals and 2 siblings were registered as domestic servants. The registration as “servant” raises doubts about the reason for the institutionalization: were these people residents or merely employees of the institution in which they lived? Most likely, at least in the case of the deaf, they were both. This is suggested by the fact that most individuals were not registered as servants when they entered an institution (table 7.6). Therefore, they were probably not hired by the institution. They were usually registered as servants after they had spent some time in the institution. As most of the ‘servant-residents’ were still quite young, they may have been employed by the institution to perform household chores and deliver messages. The institution could benefit from their efforts, while the residents themselves were occupied.

**Table 7.6** Unique occupations at different times of institutionalization, in %

	Deaf			Siblings		
	Arrival	Interval	Death	Arrival	Interval	Death
N=	79	57	59	20	3	11
Agriculture	1.3	0	0	0	0	0
Unskilled labour	3.8	1.8	5.1	5	0	0
Crafts	0	1.8	0	0	0	0
Textile & Clothing	12.7	19.3	11.9	5	0	9.1
Domestic service	3.8	14	6.8	10	0	0
Other	1.3	0	0	5	0	0
Without occupation	13.9	17.5	69.4	25	0	72.7
Blank	63.2	45.6	6.8	50	100	18.2
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Table 7.6 takes into account the moment of registration: for each individual I have selected the occupation that was mentioned at their first registration at an institution (arrival), at the last registration (which was usually at death – hence death) and the unique occupations in between (interval). Individuals recorded only once in an institution are found in the first column. Most siblings were recorded only once or twice in an institution because generally they only stayed for a short period (first at admission and last at death). This explains the low number of individuals in the interval column. The table looks at unique occupations. Thus, Sophie Gyselinck was registered as a blank on arrival, counted once as a blank and once as a servant in the period in between (interval) and as without occupation at death.

Table 7.6 reveals a surprising pattern in the deaf population. A comparison of the occupations on arrival and during institutionalization (interval) shows that more deaf in-

dividuals had a recorded occupation while living in the institution compared to the moment they entered the institution. At admission, 77 percent of the deaf individuals were either without occupation or had no registered occupation. In the period between admission and departure, this was the case for ‘only’ 63 percent. A cautious interpretation is required though, as the duration in both columns is different. The occupations at admission represent one snapshot in time: the date at which a person entered the institution. The ‘interval’ occupations, on the other hand, cover the entire period between first and last registration. Nonetheless, it is interesting to find that individuals were able to continue exercising their occupation or found new employment within an institution – even if it was just for a short period of time. Jan Franciscus De Backer was recorded as a weaver before and at the moment of his admission in 1847 to the *Hospice Sint-Vincent de Paul* in Waarschoot. Jan Franciscus continued to be registered as a weaver at the institution in all the population registers up to and including the one for 1867. According to his death certificate in 1879, he worked as a labourer. Octavie Ide, on the other hand, had no recorded occupation when she entered the *Hospice des Incurables* in 1867, but was employed as a seamstress according to the subsequent registers in 1881 and 1891. These examples confirm that the textile and clothing sector in particular offered employment to men and women during their stay at an institution. At the final registration, the vast majority of residents were registered without occupation. Considering that residents generally stayed in the institution until death, by which time most of them had reached old age, this is not surprising.

In sum, the analyses have shown that the residents of an institution were able to exercise an occupation, though in a limited number of sectors. Not coincidentally, residents were employed in occupations performable within the institution. If they had been able to work outside an institution, they would probably be less in need of institutional support. Sources such as the rule book of Hospice Lousbergs suggest that residents were encouraged to engage in household activities and jobs. Many of these everyday jobs may not have been noted in the population and civil registers. This may explain the high number of residents with no (recorded) occupation. Why the occupations of some were reported and those of others were not is unclear. Perhaps the registration of employment implied that professional activities were paid for, while those performing informal tasks were not.

A section on life before and life within an institution should logically be followed by a section on life after institutionalization. However, for the vast majority of institutionalized people there was no life after the institution. 91 percent of the deaf and 95 percent



of the siblings died in an institution, and in the case of the deaf usually after a lengthy stay. Thus institutions were generally final residences.<sup>71</sup>

### 7.2.5 Deaf people in prison

In this final section, I focus on prisons as a special type of institution in which criminal deaf people could be forced to reside. It is not my ambition, and not in my power, to provide a comprehensive overview of the number of deaf persons that ended up in a Flemish prison and for what reasons. This type of research requires other sources, such as prison and judicial records. However, my interest in the deviant behaviour of deaf persons was aroused by two observations. First, according to nineteenth-century legislation deaf people could be less liable for the crimes they committed than hearing people. Second, many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century newspapers reported crimes in which deaf people were involved.

The extent to which deaf persons were accountable for their criminal actions according to nineteenth-century laws reflects contemporary opinions on the intellectual abilities of deaf persons. In section 3.4 I established that for a long time deaf people were perceived as unreasonable and immoral. Hearing society believed that deaf people did not know justice from injustice or right from wrong. According to Frederick Woodbridge, deaf-mute people were therefore considered not to be responsible for their crimes. He dates the origin of this legal dispensation back to Roman law, where a deaf and dumb person could not enter into the *stipulatio*, the basic form of contract which was designed in the format of questions and answers. According to Woodbridge, this view of absolute non-liability prevailed in England until at least the early seventeenth century.<sup>72</sup> However, in the course of the eighteenth century, parallel to the development of deaf schools, the perception grew that deaf people could be raised to think and reason: by teaching deaf people sign language, reading and writing they could become rational. This idea resonated in the European penal statutes on deaf people. In 1827, J. C. Hoffbauer, doctor in law at the University of Halle (Germany), examined the relationship between deaf-mutism and legal responsibility. Deaf-mute people without education, he concluded, were deprived of the education necessary to understand they were legally responsible for their actions. In that sense, they were on a par with ‘idiots’. However, deaf persons who were able to communicate by writing or signs had proved that they were intellectually capable and thus accountable for their actions. As a way of prevent-

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<sup>71</sup> I discussed the few exceptions in 7.2.1.

<sup>72</sup> Woodbridge, F. (1939) “Some Unusual Aspects of Mental Irresponsibility in the Criminal Law” *Journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 6, 834-42.

ing deaf persons from pretending to be uneducated and, consequently, from being wrongfully acquitted, he suggested accusing deaf persons of a more serious crime than the one they had supposedly committed. Because then the deaf person would use all their communication skills to prove their innocence. Another possibility was to retrieve a letter written by the accused in the period before they committed the crime.<sup>73</sup> Mid-nineteenth century Belgian criminal laws express a similar attitude towards deaf offenders. J.-S.-G. Nypels, professor at the University of Liège and member of the commission instated to revise the Belgian penal code in 1867, stated that a deaf-mute offender aged over 16 should be acquitted if they acted injudiciously. However, depending on their circumstances, the offender was to be returned to the parents or placed in an institution for deaf-mutes for instruction and detention for a number of years to be determined by the government (maximum five years). On the other hand, if the offender acted cautiously, he was to be punished in the same way as hearing minors.<sup>74</sup> Adult deaf-mute offenders were thus legally viewed and treated as minors. By the early twentieth century, we find indications that legislation concerning deaf people has become stricter. The publication of Albert C. Gaw, assistant professor at Gallaudet College, regarding the legal status of the deaf in France, England and the United States, indicates that in 1907 deaf-mutism in itself was no longer seen as a reason for unaccountability or even for the pleading of extenuating circumstances. Only if the mental condition of the accused deaf-mute person was of a nature that made them unaware of the consequences of their actions, would they be acquitted. So, deaf-mutism was no longer believed to be inextricably linked with mental incapacity: “*the presumption that formerly existed (and still exists) that an illiterate deaf-mute who commits a crime has not sufficient understanding to be brought to trial and punished therefore*”<sup>75</sup> no longer held. By the early twentieth century, deaf people of normal intelligence were held fully responsible for their actions.<sup>76</sup>

Several Belgian newspaper articles confirm that deaf-mutism could be an extenuating factor in the conviction of deaf culprits. On November 10, 1869 *L’Echo du Parlement* reported on the conviction of Louis Joseph Van Aeken, a 30-year-old deaf-mute man living in Brussels (figure 7.10). Louis Joseph was convicted and sentenced to six months’ imprisonment for beating his mother under the influence of alcohol. However, “it is be-

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<sup>73</sup> Hoffbauer, J.C. (1827) *Médecine légale relative aux aliénés et aux sourds-muets ou les lois appliquées aux désordres de l’intelligence*. Paris: J.B. Baillière, 222-4.

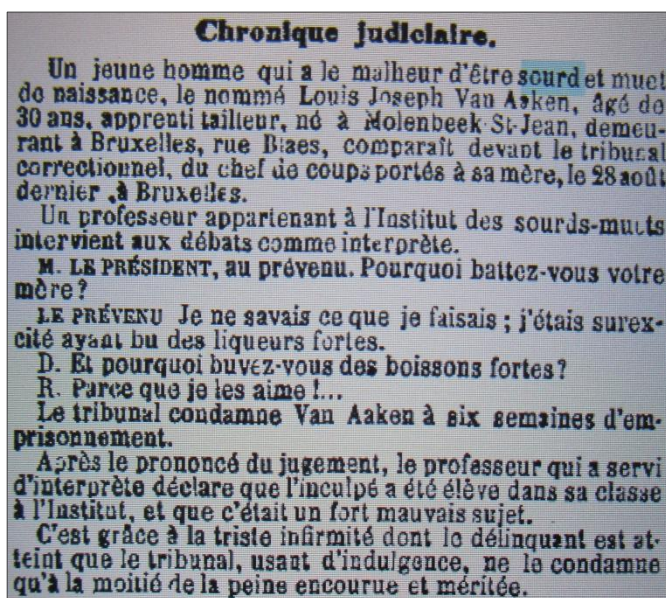
<sup>74</sup> Nypels, J.-S.-G. (1867) *Législation criminelle de la Belgique, ou commentaire et complément du code pénal Belge*. Brussels: Bruylant et compagnie, 12-3. See also: Société de Législation Comparée (1869) *Bulletin de la société de législation comparée*. Paris: Librairie du Conseil d’Etat, 166.

<sup>75</sup> Gaw, D.C.L. (1907) *The Legal Status of the Deaf. The Development of the Rights and Responsibilities of Deaf-Mutes in the Laws of the Roman Empire, France, England and America*. Washington: Press of Gibson Brothers, 67 & 93.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibidem*.

cause of the unfortunate impairment of which the offender suffers that the court, being indulgent, has only condemned him for half the punishment incurred and deserved". Another example dates back to February 1882 and was reported in *De Koophandel*. The newspaper described the case of Joseph Marion, a deaf-mute man who had committed adultery with a married woman. The woman's husband had prosecuted him for adultery, but the Public Prosecutor was of the opinion that the deaf-mute, who could not read or write, did not know he had sinned against the Criminal Code and had not learned to distinguish between a married and unmarried woman. As a result, Joseph was acquitted, while the adulteress was sentenced to one month in prison.<sup>77</sup>

Figure 7.10 Article published in *L'Echo du Parlement*, November 10, 1869<sup>78</sup>



However, other articles give no indication that deaf-mute culprits were treated any differently from hearing offenders. In April 1911, a deaf-mute man, who earned a living by selling postcards, was accused of having stolen two billiard balls. When he was arrested,

<sup>77</sup> Article (no title), in *De Koophandel*, February 5, 1882.

<sup>78</sup> Translation: A young man who has the misfortune of being deaf and dumb from birth, named Louis Joseph Van Aaken, aged 30, tailor apprentice, born in Sint-Jans-Molenbeek, living in Brussels, street Blaes, has appeared before the magistrates' court charged with hitting his mother, last August 28, in Brussels. A professor associated with the institute for deaf-mute boys acted as an interpreter. M. LE PRESIDENT, to the defendant. Why have you beaten your mother? THE DEFENDANT I do not know why I have done it; I was agitated because I drank hard liquor. D. And why do you drink hard liquor? R. Because I like it! The court has condemned Van Aaken to six months imprisonment. After the verdict, the professor who acted as an interpreter declared that the accused had been a student in his class at the institute, and that he was a very bad pupil. It is because of the unfortunate impairment of which the offender suffers that the court, being indulgent, has only condemned him for half the punishment incurred and deserved.

he declared not to know his name, nor his parents or place of birth; “although he was perfectly able to read and write”. In the end, the thief was sentenced to one month in prison and a fine.<sup>79</sup> In December 1901, the *Vooruit* reported of a “terrible tragedy”: Franz Levree, a deaf-mute man, had killed his brother-in-law and buried his remains in the basement. However, a few days later, Levree’s sister and mother, fearing a house search, dug up the body, boiled it and fed it to the pigs. In the end, the defendants confessed the crime and Franz was sentenced to death. The two women were convicted to 12 and 4 years’ hard labour.<sup>80</sup> The normal course of proceedings in these two cases, similar to crimes involving hearing persons, may be an indication that by the early twentieth century deaf-mute offenders were no longer treated differently. On the other hand, it may indicate that there was a certain arbitrariness in the conviction of deaf-mute persons, depending on the views of the officials in question. Undoubtedly, the severity of the crime committed also played a role. Acquitting a deaf person of adultery seems to have been less problematic than clearing them of murder.

The newspapers not only reported crimes in which deaf persons were the perpetrators, but also many cases where deaf persons were the victims. Several of the articles suggest that deaf men and women were seen as passive and easy targets. In November 1904, *Het Laatste Nieuws* reported of the conviction of man who had stolen money from two deaf-mutes. The article reported that the man “thought that the deaf-mutes would not be able to testify”. However, “great was his surprise when the director of the institution for deaf-mute children in Woluwe arrived and translated the signs of the accusers”.<sup>81</sup> Similar considerations may have driven men to assault and rape deaf women. *Het Nieuws Van Den Dag* of September 8, 1905 described the abuse of a 23-year-old deaf girl. The girl was living together with her widowed mother in a rented room in Antwerp. When the two men, who had come to check the locks in the house, noticed the girl was alone, they took the opportunity “to abuse her in the most horrible way”. The men fled, but they were arrested later that day.<sup>82</sup> Some newspaper articles tell stories of exploitation and the cruel treatment of deaf persons, children in particular, apparently for the sole reason that they were deaf-mute. For example, *Het Handelsblad* reported in June 1845 that a deaf-mute boy had died because he had been dragged through the street, tied to a horse. The article describes how boys had been mocking the deaf-mute boy, when a wagoner with a horse and carriage passed by. The man wanted to “play along” and told the children “to have a laugh”, after which he tied the deaf boy to his horse and whipped the

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<sup>79</sup> “Een doofstomme dief”, in *Gazet van Antwerpen*, April 21, 1911.

<sup>80</sup> “Vreeselijk drama”, in *Vooruit*, December 6, 1901.

<sup>81</sup> “De dief der doofstommen”, in *Het Laatste Nieuws*, November 19, 1904.

<sup>82</sup> “Antwerpen”, in *Het Nieuws Van Den Dag*, September 8, 1905.

horse.<sup>83</sup> In 1898, *Het Nieuws Van Den Dag* told the story of a deaf-mute boy, who had been found on the streets of Antwerp by a “couple living in the most lazy manner”. The couple had taken the boy in and forced him to beg and, because of his impairment, he usually brought home quite a lot of money. This abuse carried on for fifteen years until the boy was able to flee. The couple went out to search for the boy and when they found him, they attacked him. The police intervened and arrested the couple. The deaf boy was put into an institution.<sup>84</sup>

This is just a brief discussion of the ways in which deaf people came into contact with the law. A more detailed study of court records could perhaps shed more light on the extent to which deaf persons were relatively more or less involved in crime and how their punishment may have differed from that given to hearing offenders. The aim of this discussion was to show how attitudes towards deaf people, both regarding their intellectual capabilities and their assumed inability to stand up for themselves, had a major impact on formal regulations, such as legislation.

## 7.2.6 Summary

This section has explored the characteristics of a group of individuals who spent part of their lives in an institution. In the course of the nineteenth century it became more common for people to enter an institution in times of poverty, illness or old age. A more rigorous policy towards the different types of poor people and a changing – more professional and medical – response to disability and death were at the basis of the increased institutionalization. As a result, more people in the nineteenth century entered an institution, at a younger age and for an extended period. At least 23 percent (N=64) of the deaf people lived in an institution for a prolonged period of time. Making a distinction according to birth cohort, the institutionalization rate increased from 19 percent for the deaf men and women born in the first birth cohort to 46 percent in the second birth cohort. Among the siblings, long-term institutionalization was more rare (4 percent), but still 13 percent died within the walls of an institution.

While hospitalization was the most common type of institutionalization for the hearing, deaf people could be found in a wide variety of institutions, ranging from poor-houses and hospices to mental institutions. The spread of deaf people over different types of institutions illustrates the undifferentiated admission policy of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century institutions, but it also reflects the different views on deaf people:

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<sup>83</sup> Article (no title), in *Het Handelsblad*, June 20, 1845.

<sup>84</sup> “Antwerpen”, in *Het Nieuws Van Den Dag*, August 25, 1898.

deaf people as poor, as incurable, and even as mentally ill. Admission to an institution was affected by various personal characteristics, which could act in a negative way, such as living in the city and being jobless or unskilled, as well as in a positive way, such as being married and having siblings. This confirms, in line with my findings in the previous chapter, that institutionalization was to an important extent influenced by the availability of relatives and economic considerations. Besides these quantifiable variables, other factors such as social pressures and personal agency may also have played their part. Based on descriptions of the rigid living conditions within institutions, I suggested that entering an institution was probably mostly a 'choice' forced by necessity.

Once people were institutionalized, I have little information about the daily lived experiences inside an institution. The demographic sources are inadequate in this matter. However, the occupations recorded for residents in the population and civil registers of institutions indicate that it was possible to exercise an occupation during institutionalization. For the majority, nonetheless, institutionalization meant the end of their formal professional careers. This does not imply that residents were not engaged in informal labour activities. Based on the idea that an institution functioned as a home for its inhabitants, it is likely they performed household chores (and were perhaps obliged to do this). The life courses after institutionalization did not need much examination as the vast majority of institutionalized individuals stayed in the institution until they died.

### 7.3 Old age

Parallel to the difficulties many contemporary societies have with rising welfare costs related to the proportional rise in the ageing population, the living arrangements of elderly people have attracted major scientific and historical interest in the last few decades.<sup>85</sup> At the heart of the debate are questions as to how and why the living arrangements of the aged have changed over time and how social welfare was and should be organized. According to historian Steven Ruggles, the living arrangements of the aged

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<sup>85</sup> E.g. Ruggles, S. (2001) "Living Arrangements and Well-being of Older Persons in the Past" In: *Living Arrangements of Older Persons: Critical Issues and Policy Responses*. United Nations Publications, 111-60; Alter, G., Cliggett, L. & Urbiel, A. (1996) "Household Patterns of the Elderly and the Proximity of Children in a Nineteenth Century City: Verviers, Belgium, 1831-1846" In: Hareven, T.K. (ed.) *Aging and Generational Relations over the Life Course: A Historical and Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 30-42; Kertzer, D.I. (1995) "Toward a Historical Demography of Aging" In: Kertzer, D.I. & Laslett, P. (eds.) *Aging in the Past: Demography, Society and Old Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 363-83.

underwent a simplification in the course of the twentieth century. While today most elderly persons reside alone or with only their spouses, this was exceedingly rare prior to the twentieth century. Before this period, aged people would have lived predominantly with their children.<sup>86</sup> Unmarried children in particular provided most of the support, according to George Alter, Lisa Cliggett and Alex Urbiel. In a population with a high age at marriage and celibacy rates of between 10 to 20 percent, most parents could rely on at least one unmarried child in old age. In this way, elderly people could benefit from the financial support of children without losing their status as the household head.<sup>87</sup> Thus, prior to the development of a modern welfare system, elderly people were primarily, and legally, the responsibility of family.<sup>88</sup> The shift to independent living in the twentieth century has been explained by the increase in the resources of the aged, the increasing opportunities for children and declining parental control.<sup>89</sup> However, according to historian David Thomson, the dependency on family in the period before does not necessarily imply that the provision of social welfare in the past was merely the responsibility of individuals and families. Thomson therefore calls for a detailed examination of the assumed dichotomy “*between a ‘traditional’ society of individuals and families, and a ‘modern’ society based around the paternalistic bureaucratic state*”.<sup>90</sup>

Answering this call exceeds the possibilities of this current research. Nevertheless, the focus of this research allows to address the questions above from a new perspective. Based on the residential information in the civil and population registers, I can examine how the living arrangements of elderly deaf people differed from aged people without congenital disabilities, and how they changed over time. Moreover, the historical study of the elderly has up until now mainly focused on an ‘average’ population, most of whom were married. As the deaf were mostly unmarried, this study also enables to shed light on the survival strategies of a larger group of elderly singles. In addition, the source materials allow one to explore the retirement age of elderly persons by looking into the registration of occupations in old age. This gives us an indication of the extent to which individuals, deaf and hearing alike, were required to keep working or were able to rely on social welfare provisions or familial support in old age.

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<sup>86</sup> Ruggles, S. (2001) “Living Arrangements and Well-being of Older Persons in the Past”, 111.

<sup>87</sup> Alter, G., Cliggett, L. & Urbiel, A. (1996) “Household Patterns of the Elderly”, 32.

<sup>88</sup> Bengtsson, T. (2002) “Why Dad Dies. The Mortality of Men in their Working Ages in the 18th and 19th Centuries” In: Derosas, R. & Oris, M. (eds.) *When Dad Died. Individuals and Families Coping with Distress in Past Societies*. Bern: Lang, 81-98.

<sup>89</sup> Ruggles, S. (2001) “Living Arrangements and Well-being of Older Persons in the Past”, 111.

<sup>90</sup> Thomson, D. (1984) “‘I Am Not My Father’s Keeper’: Families and the Elderly in Nineteenth Century England” *Law and History Review*, 2, 285-6.

A question that needs answering before we can turn to the analysis is: when does old age begin? Sociologists, behavioural scientists and other scholars have tended to equate the start of old age with the pensionable ages of 60 and 65. However, in the period before pension schemes had been developed by the government, definitions of old age varied greatly. In her article on the evolution of the English definition of old age, Janet Roebuck even states that parish authorities set no specific age at which people were considered automatically 'aged'. Old age was more "a question of function, or lack of it, than a question of precise calendar years". Only when a person was physically old and incapable of supporting themselves was a person considered old by the authorities. The ages of elderly people could therefore range from their late forties or early fifties to seventies and eighties. Only when the discussion of official pension schemes started, at the end of the nineteenth century, did an official definition of old age become imperative.<sup>91</sup> In Belgium, in 1900 the official retirement age was set at 65. In this section, I have set the boundary between adulthood and old age at age 60. This delineation is roughly based on the life expectancy rates at the time.<sup>92</sup> At age 60, about half the research population had died.

### 7.3.1 Living arrangements and retirement

There were 286 deaf and hearing individuals (49 percent of the total population) who were still alive at age 60. In the next section on mortality, I explore the personal characteristics that may have contributed to reaching old age – more precisely those that decreased the risk of dying young. For now, the focus is on the ways in which elderly people structured their life courses: where they lived and how they maintained themselves.

Table 7.7 displays the living arrangements of the group of 286 deaf and hearing individuals who died after their 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. I distinguish four types of living arrangements: individuals could 1) live in an institution, 2) live in the household of another household head, 3) live in their own household (as household head) together with others, or 4) live on their own. A fifth category ('unknown') was added to include those individuals for whom it was uncertain whether they were living in or living together with

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<sup>91</sup> Roebuck, J. (1979) "When Does Old Age Begin? The Evolution Of The English Definition" *Journal of Social History*, 12/3, 416-29.

<sup>92</sup> Calculations of the life expectancy at adult age (35) show that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the general population in Ghent lived on average for another 27 to 28 years – until they reached the age of 62 to 63. Devos, I. (2006) *Allemaal beestjes. Mortaliteit en morbiditeit in Vlaanderen, 18de-20ste Eeuw*. Ghent: Academia Press, 78; Vermeulen, I. (2002) *Bijdrage tot de studie van de mortaliteit in Gent tijdens de 18de eeuw: casus: de Sint-Salvadorparochie*. Ghent: Ghent University (unpublished master's dissertation).



others. The table takes into account 392 unique living situations of 286 individuals. In other words, a person was included more than once in the table if they changed their living situation in old age. For example, Bruno De Rubbel lived together with unmarried siblings until he was 81. He spent the final months of his life in an institution. Bruno is counted twice in the analysis.

**Table 7.7** Living arrangements of the elderly (>60 years old) according to birth cohort, disability and gender, in %

	Birth cohort 1				Birth cohort 2			
	Deaf		Siblings		Deaf		Siblings	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
<b>N=</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>63</b>
Institution	20	21	6	2	53	44	22	16
Living in	25	43	9	12	18	12	6	9
Parents	6	6	0	0	0	0	0	0
Siblings	47	44	0	20	33	40	0	0
Children	0	6	25	40	0	20	67	67
Family	20	33	0	0	22	20	0	0
Unrelated	27	11	75	40	45	20	33	33
%	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Living together (household head)	27	17	53	59	20	20	40	59
Spouse <sup>93</sup>	50	14	68	50	40	25	55	40
Children	13	0	16	29	10	13	15	38
Siblings	25	71	8	17	30	50	20	11
Family	0	0	0	4	0	0	5	3
Unrelated	13	14	8	0	20	13	5	8
%	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Living alone	2	0	0	2	0	7	10	2
Unknown	26	19	32	25	9	17	22	14
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Notes: the 'N' refers to the number of unique living situations, not to the number of elderly individuals. The actual number of individuals within each category are respectively: 47, 35, 35, 32, 37, 29, 32 and 39 persons.

<sup>93</sup> The category *Spouse* comprises individuals who lived together with their spouse and often with children. The category *Children* comprises individuals who lived with children only.

Based on table 7.7, differences between deaf and hearing elderly people and between the generations are revealed. In both birth cohorts, elderly brothers and sisters mainly lived together with others, most frequently with their spouses and children. Keeping in mind the high marriage rates in the sibling cohorts, this is less of a surprise. Men were more likely to live with spouses than women. This reflects the higher mortality of men, the age differences between spouses and the higher number of permanently single women.<sup>94</sup> In the absence of a spouse, hearing individuals usually lived with unmarried children (in the case of widowhood) or with siblings (in the case of being single). Living in another household was rarer, and limited to living in with married children or unrelated persons. This suggests that most men and women chose to remain heads of their own households for as long as possible. Women seem to have preferred living in with children, while more men lived in the households of non-kin. The people in the latter group were either boarders or servants living in the house of their employer. The observations for the elderly sibling population reflect the general living arrangement patterns for the region.<sup>95</sup>

Among the deaf, the preference for a living situation in which they lived with others was less pronounced. Moreover, within the group of individuals *living together*, it was more common to spend old age with siblings or unrelated persons than with a spouse and/or children. The difficulties the deaf, and especially women, had encountered on the marriage market during adulthood continued to affect their life courses in old age. Being single, the majority of the deaf women either chose to live with unmarried siblings or to live in the households of married siblings, family members or unrelated persons. As in the sibling cohorts, the latter group consisted of boarders or servants. Similar to the sibling cohort, deaf men more often chose to live with or in the household of non-kin, while women usually opted for the familiarity of relatives (siblings, cousins, nieces and nephews).

A substantial proportion of deaf people also spent (part of) their old age in an institution, with the numbers increasing substantially in the second birth cohort. In many cases unmarried and/or childless elderly deaf persons must have been forced to rely on support from the community. This also occurred in the sibling cohort, though the increase in institutionalization is not as striking. However, the percentages in the table should be interpreted with caution as they are somewhat over-representative. People who only died in an institution, usually a hospital, are taken into account as well. This 'problem' holds particularly for the siblings. Nonetheless, the previous section demon-

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<sup>94</sup> Alter, G., Cliggett, L. & Urbiel, A. (1996) "Household Patterns of the Elderly", 35.

<sup>95</sup> Alter et al. also found that elderly people usually lived with their spouses. In the case of widowhood, they preferred living with an unmarried child or moving into the household of a married child. Alter, G., Cliggett, L. & Urbiel, A. (1996) "Household Patterns of the Elderly".

strated the rise in the number of individuals who entered an institution and usually also spent their old age there.

Finally, the table confirms the statement by Ruggles that living alone was rare among elderly people prior to the twentieth century. The highest percentage is found in the second birth cohort of brothers. About one-tenth of the brothers spent part of their old age living on their own. However, a closer examination of the individual life courses shows that the period of independent living was usually short and took place when the men were in their early sixties. Only Joannes Kints and Vital Callaert were in their mid-seventies when they lived on their own. Both farmers ended up alone after their relatives died or moved away and they presumably continued to run the farm on their own. The 7 percent in the second female deaf cohort is due to three exceptional women. Marie Amelberga Vergauwen, Marie Sophie De Meire and Romanie Langenhove all lived on their own for about ten years, in their seventies and eighties. The three women had lived with siblings or in the case of Romanie, with her husband, but after these persons had died or moved away, the women continued to live on their own. Marie Sophie worked as a glove maker, but Marie Amelberga and Romanie were recorded as without occupation. However, as these women reached their seventies in the 1930s, they were most likely living on a pension. Prior to the twentieth century, as 7.3.2 will show, fewer elderly people had this opportunity.

An important obstacle to independent living prior to the twentieth century was presumably the absence of pension schemes. This is not to say that persons did not receive any support in old age, but the assistance was not universal. Until the nineteenth century, only elderly people who could no longer work were considered among the deserving poor. They could receive support at home or, if they had no family or were ill, in an institution. Those who were old but still able to work were expected to keep providing for their own maintenance.<sup>96</sup> In the course of the nineteenth century, private initiatives to support people in old age unfolded as workers formed insurance companies, *Maatschappijen voor Onderlinge bijstand* (mutual aid societies). The workers made regular small payments to the society, which in its turn provided benefits in times of unemployment, an inability to work and old age. Encouraged by the emergent labour movement, these local companies were converted into *Mutualiteiten* (health services). Only in 1891 did the national government start to subsidize the health services. This government intervention, a response to the ongoing economic crisis and the major strikes of 1886, led to the foundation of national health services in Belgium. Nonetheless, joining a national health

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<sup>96</sup> Vercauteren, G. (2001) “De zorg voor de behoeftige ouderen te Antwerpen in de negentiende eeuw”, 255-6.

service scheme remained voluntary and workers could decide not to sign up.<sup>97</sup> According to an international study into the *Workingmen's Insurance* by W. F. Willoughby, the 369 official mutual aid societies in Belgium had 54,347 members in 1890.<sup>98</sup> This number indicates that the majority of workers were uninsured. It is unclear to what extent deaf people could join these mutual aid societies. In 4.5.2 I stated that many deaf clubs formed their own mutual health insurance schemes in the nineteenth century. According to Raemdonck and Scheiris, this was because they were unable to become full members of the existing mutual health insurance schemes and because of the difficulties in attaining a leading position in the organizations of the hearing.<sup>99</sup> In addition to these insurances societies, deaf people were always entitled to poor relief as their impairment made them *deserving* their entire lives.

However, based on the ages at which occupations were recorded for the elderly persons in the dataset, we have the impression that despite these welfare provisions, deaf and hearing people alike were required to work for as long as possible. Table 7.8 presents the percentages of elderly men and women, after the age of 60, with and without a recorded occupation. The table takes into consideration 267 individuals. 19 elderly individuals (8 deaf people and 11 siblings) were excluded because the sources made no report of (the absence of) an occupation. An example illustrates how the percentages are to be interpreted: for 70 percent of the 79 deaf men an occupation was recorded after their 60<sup>th</sup> birthday; respectively for 80 percent of the 45 deaf men in the first birth cohort and 56 percent of the 34 deaf men in the second birth cohort (the 'N' for each group, according to birth cohort, is given in the notes below the table).

Individuals can be included in both the categories with and without occupation, as they could initially have had an occupation and then later become unemployed. For this reason, the sum of the column percentages exceeds 100 percent. The table also mentions the average ages (in years) at which the occupation was recorded. For those with multiple recordings of an actual occupation, I took into account the highest age; for those with multiple recordings of "without occupation", the youngest age. This is because I am interested in the average ages *until* which people worked and the average *start* of retirement.

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<sup>97</sup> In the interwar period, it became obligatory for workers to be insured against old age, illness, family benefits and paid holidays: FOD Sociale Zekerheid (2011) *Sociale zekerheid. Alles wat je altijd al wilde weten*. [http://social-security.fgov.be/docs/nl/publicaties/alwa/alwa2011\\_jan\\_nl.pdf](http://social-security.fgov.be/docs/nl/publicaties/alwa/alwa2011_jan_nl.pdf), consulted on 9/09/2014, 6-8.

<sup>98</sup> Willoughby, W.F. (1898) *Workingmen's Insurance*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Company, 202.

<sup>99</sup> Raemdonck, L. & Scheiris, I. (2007) *Ongehoord verleden. Dove frontvorming in België aan het begin van de 20ste eeuw*. Ghent: Fevlado-diversus vzw, 53.

**Table 7.8** Occupations of the elderly (>60 years old) according to disability and gender, in % and years

	Deaf				Siblings			
	Men (N=79)		Women (N=61)		Men (N=63)		Women (N=64)	
	%	Age	%	Age	%	Age	%	Age
Occupation	70	70.6	41	69.4	89	70.1	59	70.3
Birth cohort 1	80	70.9	49	68.9	97	71.4	67	71.1
Birth cohort 2	56	70.1	31	70.5	79	68.1	53	69.4
Without occupation	51	72.8	69	74	29	74.6	59	74.9
Birth cohort 1	38	74.6	54	73.3	9	76	47	74.3
Birth cohort 2	68	71.4	89	74.1	52	74.2	71	74.9
<i>Total</i> <sup>100</sup>	121		110		118		118	

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Notes: for birth cohort 1, N= 45 deaf men, 35 deaf women, 34 brothers, 30 sisters. For birth cohort 2, N= 34 deaf men, 26 deaf women, 29 brothers, 34 sisters

Table 7.8 shows that the majority of the men, in particular the brothers, continued to work in old age. Sources reported an occupation for 70 percent of the deaf men and 89 percent of the brothers after their 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. The last registration of employment occurred at an average age of respectively about 70 years in both the male deaf and hearing cohorts. A comparison of the first and second birth cohorts indicates a decline in the percentages of working men and the ages until which they generally worked.

Simultaneously, there was a decrease in the average age at which the men were recorded without occupation for the first time – the start of their retirement one could say. In the first birth cohort, deaf and hearing men were on average 74 and 76 when they were recorded without occupation for the first time. In the second birth cohort, the average ages had come down to respectively about 71 and 74. Taking into account that people in the second birth cohort reached old age at the turn of the twentieth century, this decline is probably related to developments in social welfare provisions. The lower percentages of employed deaf men and their lower age at retirement compared to the brothers suggest that deaf persons could more easily rely on receiving benefits and were under less pressure to keep working. On the other hand, deaf men may also have had fewer opportunities to work. Deaf persons faced greater difficulties in finding employment during adulthood (see 4.3.2) and this probably continued into old age. The large number of deaf men who lived in an institution, financed by the Commission of Civil Hospices, probably also contributed to the lower employment rates of the deaf.

<sup>100</sup> 16 deaf men were registered both with and without an occupation. The same applies to 6 deaf women, 11 hearing men and 12 hearing women.

The most common types of occupation among the men with a registered occupation were in agriculture and unskilled labour, together accounting for respectively 62 and 73 percent of the occupations of the deaf men and brothers. 25 percent of the deaf men were recorded as working in the garment and textile sector (compared to 6 percent of the brothers). This pattern is more or less consistent with the employment pattern of the economically active population.<sup>101</sup> Men thus usually continued to work in the sector they had worked in as adults.

**Table 7.9** Average ages at death of the elderly (>60 years old) according to disability and gender, in N and years

	Deaf				Siblings			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	N	Age	N	Age	N	Age	N	Age
Birth cohort 1	44	72.7	35	72.4	33	71.6	30	75
Birth cohort 2	34	72.3	26	75.4	28	73	33	76.5
<i>Total</i> <sup>102</sup>	78		61		61		63	

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Notes: the 'Age' columns contain the average ages at death of individuals who reached the age of at least 60 (and not of all the individuals born in the first and second birth cohorts).

A calculation of the average ages at death of the elderly men shows they were on average between 71 and 73 at death (table 7.9). Comparing these averages with the average working and retirement age, we can infer that both deaf and hearing men worked almost their entire lives, most likely until they were physically unable to work any longer. Thus, despite the fact that some types of support in old age were available, they only enabled men to retire at the very end.

Table 7.8 shows that the employment rates of the women were considerably lower as only about 41 percent of the deaf women and 59 percent of the sisters still had an occupation in old age. The percentages of women without occupation, on the other hand, amounted to 69 and 59 percent. In the late nineteenth century, similar to the male cohorts, the percentages of working women declined while the number of women without occupation increased. However, in the case of women, it is difficult to make statements about their retirement based on unemployment. The results in Chapter 4 illustrated that many women were also registered without occupation in adulthood. I have ex-

<sup>101</sup> Parallel with general developments, unskilled labour gained ascendancy over agriculture in the sibling cohort, while the garment trade became more important in the deaf cohort.

<sup>102</sup> The number of individuals within each category, except for the deaf women, slightly differs from the population sizes in table 7.8. This can be explained by the fact that the ages at death of one deaf man, 2 male siblings and 1 female sibling are unknown due to outmigration.

plained this over-representation of unemployed women from the observation that a woman's marital status was valued more highly than her occupation and by pointing out the informal character of many of the female jobs. This irregular registration of female employment may explain why the declining trend in the working and retirement age is absent in the female cohorts. Similar to the male cohorts, the lower employment rates of the deaf women can be explained by referring to the large number of deaf women who spent old age in an institution. Indeed, the previous section demonstrated that the residents of an institution were often registered without an occupation.

### **7.3.2 Summary**

This section has shown that in the nineteenth and early twentieth century it was uncommon for elderly people to live on their own. The aged siblings usually remained head of their household while living together with their spouse and children (when married) or with siblings (when single). The first birth cohort of deaf men exhibits a similar pattern, but more deaf men lived in the households of others, especially siblings, or in an institution. The latter two living arrangements were most common among deaf women as well. At the turn of the twentieth century, most deaf men and women spent (at least part of) their old age in an institution. The high institutionalization rates probably account for the lower employment rates of elderly deaf people compared to their aged siblings. Being institutionalized or entitled to other types of support, the need for deaf people to work in old age may have been less pressing – but also perhaps less feasible. Nonetheless, those who did work usually worked until 'the end' as the average retirement ages and ages at death hardly differed. In the early twentieth century, the situation started to change as retirement ages steadily went down, while life expectancy rates went up. The development of more universal social welfare systems enabled the gradual upgrading of old age as an autonomous phase in life.

## 7.4 Mortality

### 7.4.1 Introduction

Old age is naturally followed by death, though death is not necessarily preceded by a long life. Little is known about the relationship between deafness, longevity and mortality in past and present societies. “*Is the mortality greater among the deaf and dumb than the rest of the community with whom they happen to be placed?*” Sir W. Wilde wondered in 1854. However, he put his faith in future researchers to answer this question as “*we require [...] a much more extended field of inquiry, and a greater accumulation of facts, than have as yet been recorded upon this subject, to be in a position to offer an opinion thereon.*”<sup>103</sup>

In one of the few present-day studies on the topic, medical scholars Steven Barnett and Peter Franks point to the differences according to the age at onset of deafness. Based on a sample of 2728 deaf people from the US National Health Interview Survey (1990-1991), they conclude that there is no evidence of a higher mortality rate among prelingual deaf people – people who became deaf before the age of 3 – compared to non-deaf adults. However, prelingual deaf adults do have a poorer health status and pay fewer visits to physicians than hearing people. Lacking a common language with health care practitioners is considered the main disabling factor with regard to health care services use. On the other hand, adults with postlingual onset of deafness, 89 percent of whom had become deaf after their 19th birthday, appear to have a higher mortality than non-deaf adults. However, the presence of other chronic health conditions, rather than the deafness itself, was most likely the cause of premature death.<sup>104</sup>

Historical research into the mortality rates of people with disabilities is scarce. Historians Lotta Vikström and Helena Haage examined the mortality risks of 517 disabled individuals, including people with visual, auditory, physical and intellectual impairments, living in the Sundsvall region (Sweden) between 1835 and 1874. Based on a follow-up study of the disabled persons over an observation period of 18 years, they show that the risk of disabled people dying during observation was twice as high in comparison to the non-disabled population. Disabled men in particular had low survival rates. The authors link the untimely death of disabled people to social and economic exclusion processes,

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<sup>103</sup> Wilde, W.R. (1854) *On the Physical, Moral and Social Condition of the Deaf and Dumb*. London: John Churchill, 62.

<sup>104</sup> Barnett, S. & Franks, P. (1999) “Deafness and Mortality: Analyses of Linked Data from the National Health Interview Survey and National Death Index” *Public Health Reports*, 114/4, 330-6; Barnett, S. & Franks, P. (2002) “Health Care Utilization and Adults Who Are Deaf: Relationship with Age at Onset of Deafness” *Health Services Research*, 37/1, 103-18.



which in turn undermined their opportunities to achieve subsistence and integrate into society.<sup>105</sup> Although this study is an important first step in uncovering the mortality behaviour of people with disabilities in the past, the results can be debated. Studied as a single homogeneous population, differences in the mortality risks between on the one hand people with different types of impairments and, on the other, between congenitally disabled people and people who acquired an impairment later in life, are not taken into account. Assuming that people with different types of impairments were faced with similar mortality risks, based on comparable experiences of social exclusion and stigmatization, seems rather oversimplified. Moreover, some types of impairments probably entailed more health difficulties than others. Congenital deafness, for example, can be presumed to be less physically challenging than severe physical impairments. Similarly, it can be argued that the age of onset of impairment affects its impact on mortality. Congenitally disabled people were faced with difficulties over a longer period in life compared to individuals who became disabled only later in life. Additionally, becoming disabled as an adult due to an illness or injury can point to poor health or hazardous living and working conditions, detrimental to a person's survival. Therefore, the higher mortality risk of people with disabilities may have been a reflection of general poorer health rather than exclusion and marginalization.

In the next section, I examine the mortality characteristics of the research population to see whether congenital deafness had a negative effect on the survival chances of the deaf. The discovery of a structural pattern of premature death can provide suggestive evidence of poor living conditions, more difficult access to health care or generally a 'tougher' life as a consequence of being deaf. The study by Vikström and Haage suggests that the presence of a disability was positively correlated to a higher mortality rate. However, this may not have been the case for deaf-mute individuals, as research for present-day deaf men and women suggests. For an overview of general mortality characteristics in Flanders, I refer to 2.3.3. The life trajectories of the research population – all of whom were born and died between 1748 and 1956 – need to be interpreted within the described context of a general mortality decline and mid-nineteenth century stagnation in death rates.

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<sup>105</sup> Haage, H. & Vikström, L. (2013) *Estimating Death Differentials to Measure the Labelling Impact of Disability: A Case Study of Past Populations in Sweden*. Unpublished conference paper presented at the XXVII International Population Conference (IUSSP), Busan (South Korea).

## 7.4.2 Research population and methodology

Only those individuals whose life courses could be reconstructed until death qualified for analysis. Table 7.10 presents the number of deaf and hearing individuals whose date of death is known and unknown, according to birth cohort. The 253 deaf and 240 siblings with a known date of death (first row) are the starting point for the quantitative analysis.

**Table 7.10** Absolute numbers of deaf and hearing research individuals, in N

	Birth cohort 1		Birth cohort 2	
	Deaf	Siblings	Deaf	Siblings
Date of death known	133	126	120	114
Date of death unknown	6	13	25	31
<i>Total</i>	<i>139</i>	<i>139</i>	<i>145</i>	<i>145</i>

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

The mortality pattern of the research population is explored in a twofold way.

1) The focus is on more descriptive characteristics of the deceased deaf and hearing population. Quantitative analyses, such as the mean and median ages at death, the distribution of deaths over time and the life course are combined with a qualitative discussion of the causes of death of deaf persons (7.4.3.1).

2) I examine the probability of dying for the deaf and hearing cohorts using Cox regression methods. Besides the presence of a disability, *gender* and *age* constitute the most important variables. Previous studies have confirmed the differences in life span and mortality risks according to sex and age. In general, women had a higher life expectancy than men. Both biological and social determinants probably account for the difference in favour of women.<sup>106</sup> For this reason, I design a separate regression model for deaf and hearing women (table 7.13) and for deaf and hearing men (table 7.14). Besides differences according to sex, mortality risks also differed according to age. Calculations by Isabelle Devos show that in the period 1880-1998 mortality risks were high at birth, then came down shortly thereafter to a minimum risk for the 10-14 age group, after which risks steadily increased again. Comparing the sexes shows that there was a female mortality surplus in the 5-19 and 25-49 age groups, compared to the men. Difficulties during pregnancy and childbirth may explain the surplus in the latter age group. The higher mortality rates among female children and youngsters were probably the out-

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<sup>106</sup> Devos, I. (2006) *Allemaal beestjes*, 37; Waldron, I. (1983) "The Role of Genetic and Biological Factors in Sex Differences in Mortality" In: Lopez, A. & Ruczika, L.T. (eds.) *Sex Differentials in Mortality, Trends, Determinants and Consequences*, Canberra: Department of Demography, 141-64.

come of disadvantages in living and working conditions.<sup>107</sup> Gender-specific mortality risks are thus also dependent on age. To account for the different mortality risks according to age, I divide the research population into age groups. For each age group, I then run a separate Cox regression. The division into age groups is based on the proportionality assumption inherent in the Cox model. The main assumption of the Cox regression is that the effects of covariates remain unchanged during the whole period under observation. In this case, a Cox model assumes that the influence of a person's disability on their risk of dying remains the same at every age. In other words, it assumes that the distribution over age is proportional. However, Kaplan Meier representations of the mortality risk of the deaf and hearing population according to gender (figures 7.11 and 7.12) suggest that the effect of disability differed with age group. To take this non-proportionality into account, I have chosen to divide the period under observation into age categories within which the proportionality assumption did hold. Specifically, this implies that the female model is split in two age groups: women between 20 and 50, and those over 50. The male model is split at three ages: 30, 45 and 60.<sup>108</sup> In all the models *death* is the event of interest, *duration* until death the dependent variable, and *disability* the key explanatory variable. The other covariates added to the models are outlined in the introduction to the Cox regressions (7.4.3.2).

The downside of the dataset is that only research individuals who reached the age of at least 16 were included (left truncation). In the deaf population, this was the result of the sources from which the deaf individuals were selected. The conscription registers and the entry lists of the deaf schools only mentioned the names of the deaf men and women who had survived childhood. To obtain a comparable control cohort, only siblings who died after their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday were selected. As a result, it is not possible to compare the mortality risks of the deaf and hearing individuals during childhood, nor is it possible to calculate life expectancy rates. It may be interesting to examine whether deaf children had higher mortality rates than non-deaf children in future research.

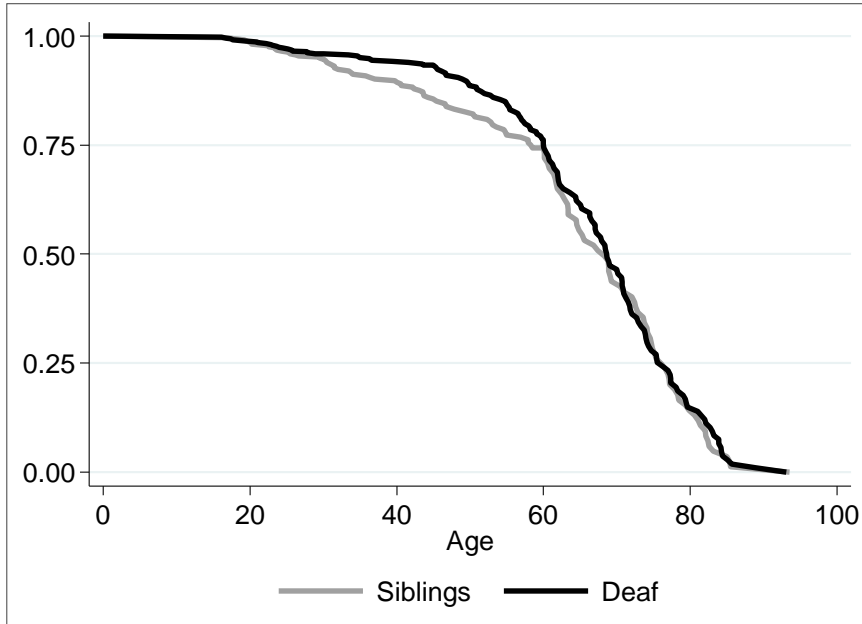
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<sup>107</sup> Devos, I. (2006) *Allemaal beestjes*, 31-2; The excess female mortality was also the focal point in: Van Poppel, F., Schellekens, J. & Walhout, E. (2009) "Oversterfte van jonge meisjes in Nederland in de negentiende en eerste helft twintigste eeuw" *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis*, 6/4, 37-69; Mc Nay, K., Humphries, J. & Klasen, S. (2005) "Excess Female Mortality in Nineteenth-Century England and Wales. A Regional Analysis" *Social Science History*, 29/4, 649-81; Perrenoud, A. (1981) "Surmortalité féminine et condition de la femme (XVII-XIXe siècles): Une vérification empirique" *Annales de Démographie Historique*, 18, 89-105.

<sup>108</sup> The male model had to be split into four age categories to resolve non-proportionality problems, while a division into two age groups sufficed in the female model. This difference between men and women suggests that the determinants of mortality were more influenced by differences according to age for men than for women.

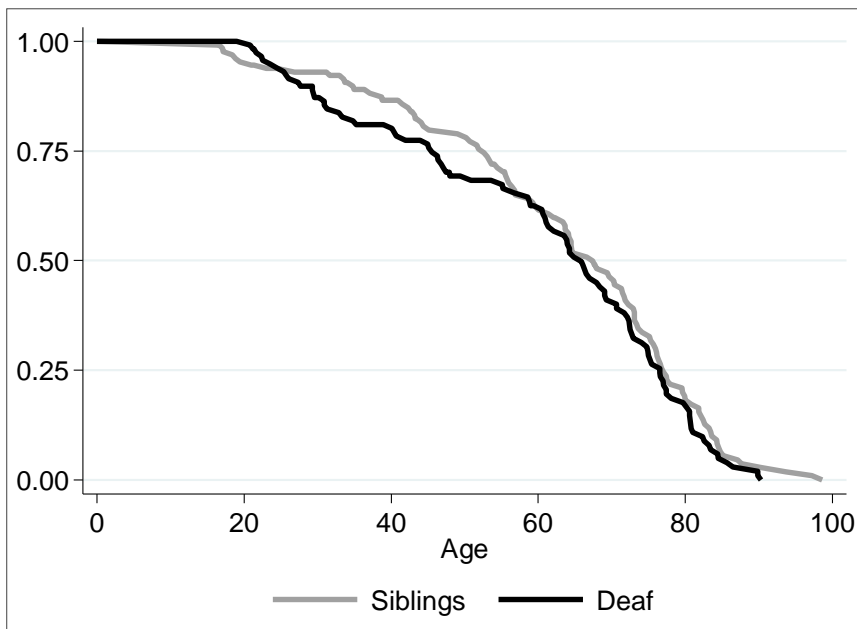
However, as there are no sources that identify deaf children at the time of birth, this seems an impossible task.

**Figure 7.11** Kaplan Meier survival estimates for the probability of death among men, by disability



Source: MS Access database, research individual file

**Figure 7.12** Kaplan Meier survival estimates for the probability of death among women, by disability



Source: MS Access database, research individual file

### 7.4.3 Mortality characteristics of the deaf

#### 7.4.3.1 Death in numbers

Before turning to the assessment of the different characteristics that may have influenced a person's risk of dying prematurely, I give a descriptive overview of the mean ages at death and the distribution of death rates, according to variables such as birth cohort, gender and living environment. These descriptives allow one to ascertain the differences and similarities between the deaf and their siblings as well as in time in a quantitative way. I then aim to determine the explanatory power of the variables through event history analysis methods (7.4.3.2).

Table 7.11 presents the mean (M) and median (Md) ages at death of the deaf and hearing individuals, according to gender and birth cohort. Except for women in the second birth cohort, deaf individuals in the other categories had ever higher ages at death. This is a first indication that deafness did not necessarily jeopardize a person's longevity. The ages at death were slightly lower in the second birth cohort. This may be a reflection of the higher mortality rates in the mid-nineteenth century, but may also be the result of more personal characteristics of the research groups.

**Table 7.11** Mean (M) and Median (Md) age at death, in years

	Birth cohort 1				Birth cohort 2			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	M	Md	M	Md	M	Md	M	Md
Deaf	60.5	62	61.4	66.3	57.8	61.5	57.8	61.4
Siblings	55	58.5	60.5	63.6	55	60.1	64.3	71.5

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Notes: the ages are calculated based on the population sizes of: 82 deaf men, 51 deaf women, 69 brothers and 57 sisters (birth cohort 1); 65 deaf men, 55 deaf women, 57 brothers and 57 sisters (birth cohort 2)

The survival rate over age groups covering 10-year intervals is shown in table 7.12. Within each age group, I calculated how many people survived until the end of the period. I divided this number by the total number of individuals at the start of the observation (total 'N'). In this way, the table shows the percentage of people who survived each age group. For example, 66 percent of the original population of 147 deaf men were still alive at the age of 55. By the age of 98, the entire research population had died.

**Table 7.12** Survival rates over age groups, in %

N=	Men		Women	
	Deaf 147	Siblings 126	Deaf 106	Siblings 114
16-25	89.1	88.1	91.5	93
26-35	85	76.2	79.2	87.7
36-45	79.6	64.3	72.6	78.1
46-55	66	54	64.2	65.8
56-65	44.2	35.7	48.1	50
66-75	18.4	17.5	25.5	28.9
76-85	1.4	0.8	3.8	5.3
86-98	0	0	0	0

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Based on this table, we see that in the male cohorts the survival rate was lower for the brothers. While the male deaf population had been halved by about age 62, half of the brothers had already died by the age of 58. The lower survival – or the higher number of deaths – for the brothers was most striking in the age groups between 26 and 55. This period more or less covers the economically productive phase of adulthood. The fact that hearing men were more often employed in physically demanding occupations may have added to the higher death toll. In the female cohorts, on the other hand, more of the sisters survived to reach old age. The difference between the two cohorts was largest in the age groups between 26 and 45. The higher survival rates of the sisters are difficult to interpret because we would assume that they faced a higher risk of dying due to pregnancy and childbirth. As fewer deaf women were married and conceived children, their risk of dying during their child-bearing years was supposedly lower. The percentages in the table contradict this assumption. Perhaps the positive effects of being married, and receiving support from a spouse, outweighed the higher risks associated with childbirth. In the event history analysis of mortality risks, I test the effect of civil status on a person's mortality. In line with previous mortality research, the survival rates of women in general were higher compared to men. Both biological and social aspects explain why men generally died at a younger age than women. However, determining how the processes of *nature* and *nurture* interacted is difficult.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Devos, I. (2006) *Allemaal beestjes*, 37.

## Causes of death

Belgium has national statistics on the causes of death that go back to 1851. In the aftermath of the cholera epidemics in the first half of the nineteenth century, municipalities were expected to keep registers containing information on the causes of death and redirect the information to the central government. As the reporting of the municipalities to the national government got off to a slow start, the information for the early years of registration is barely complete. Moreover, faulty diagnoses and misregistration due to limited medical knowledge and the silence on taboo illnesses such as syphilis, necessitate a cautious approach to nineteenth-century medical statistics. Nonetheless, they offer unique opportunities for historical research into the evolution of epidemiological patterns and causes of mortality. Based on these statistics, Devos determined that about 30 percent of all deaths in Belgium in 1870 were caused by respiratory diseases such as tuberculosis and pneumonia, and by diarrhoea and enteritis.<sup>110</sup> However, for a study with a specific focus on people with (auditory) impairments, the national statistics are of no use because of their aggregated character. Also, neither the death certificates nor the population registers mention the causes of death. We can thus only guess at the causes of death of the deaf research individuals.

Many of them can be expected to have died from natural causes. Indeed, the high average age at death suggests that most people died in old age. For those who died at a younger age, the reasons for their deaths are less certain. However, there is little reason to assume that the explanations for their premature deaths were disability-related. Non-deaf individuals could also have untimely deaths as a result of illness or injury. Moreover, the present-day observation that deaf persons are less likely to visit physicians is not really applicable to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In Chapter 2 (section 2.3.4), I argued that doctor's visits were uncommon among most of the population. The number of physicians, especially in the countryside, was limited and the price of their services exceeded the budget of most families. In the case of illness, the majority of people relied on the care of family members and sought refuge in devotion and superstition. Moreover, even if we presume that hearing persons were more likely to visit a medical practitioner, the limited medical knowledge about the causes and nature of infections and diseases made it unlikely that patients with life-threatening illnesses benefitted greatly from a doctor's visit.<sup>111</sup> So, in contrast to present societies, the unequal access to medical care of deaf people in the past was less of an issue.

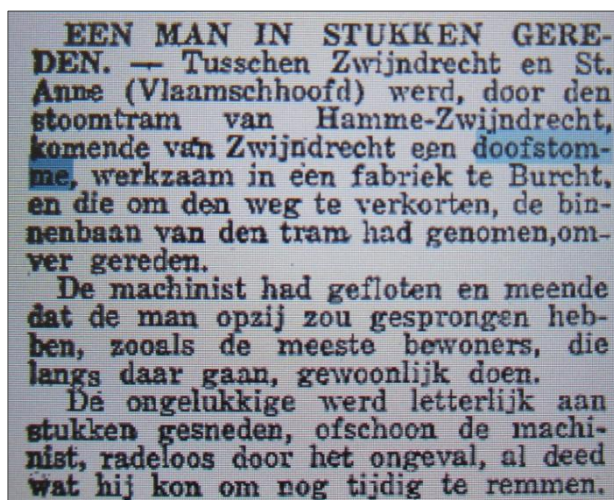
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<sup>110</sup> Devos, I. (2006) *Allemaal beestjes*, 50; Velle K. (1985) "Statistiek en sociale politiek: de medische statistiek en het gezondheidsbeleid in België in de 19de eeuw" *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, 1-2, 213-42.

<sup>111</sup> Devos, I. (2006) *Allemaal beestjes*, 84.

Yet, some deaf persons did die from accidents that were related to the nature of their impairment. This is evidenced by several nineteenth- and early twentieth-century newspaper articles.

Figure 7.13 Article published in *De Schelde*, January 20, 1921<sup>112</sup>



**EEN MAN IN STUKKEN GEREDEN.** — Tusschen Zwijndrecht en St. Anne (Vlaamschhoofd) werd, door den stoomtram van Hamme-Zwijndrecht, komende van Zwijndrecht een doofstomme, werkzaam in een fabriek te Burcht, en die om den weg te verkorten, de binnenbaan van den tram had genomen, omver gereden.  
De machinist had gefloten en meende dat de man opzij zou gesprongen hebben, zooals de meeste bewoners, die langs daar gaan, gewoonlijk doen.  
De ongelukkige werd letterlijk aan stukken gesneden, ofschoon de machinist, radeloos door het ongeval, al deed wat hij kon om nog tijdig te remmen.

On January 20, 1921 a reporter of the newspaper *De Schelde* wrote about a deaf-mute man who had been hit by a tram on his way home (figure 7.13). To get home sooner from work, he had taken a shortcut along some tram tracks. The engine driver had whistled to alert the man, but the man did not jump aside and was, as a result, “literally cut into pieces”. This type of report was not one of a kind. Dozens of newspaper articles at the end of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century reported on deaf men and women who were run over by trains, trams and carriages, though the outcome was not always fatal. The articles describe how the drivers of the different vehicles had tried to warn the deaf pedestrians, but due to their inability to hear, they reacted too late. Edmond Francois Bresous, president of the society for deaf-mutes in Ghent and a research individual, was also hit by a carriage on December 6, 1908. After the accident, he was taken to the hospital where he died five days later as a result of his injuries.<sup>113</sup> These examples suggest that deaf individuals were more likely to be involved in fatal traffic accidents because they could not hear the vehicles.

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<sup>112</sup> Translation: A man torn into pieces – between Zwijndrecht and St. Anne a deaf-mute man, employed in a factory in Burcht, was hit by a train coming from Hamme-Zwijndrecht, while he was walking on the inside lane, in a way to take a short cut. The engineer had whistled and thought the man would jump aside, as most people who walk that way usually do. The unfortunate was literally cut to pieces, although the engineer, desperate by the accident, did what he could to stop.

<sup>113</sup> Article in *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, December 14, 1908.



Besides traffic accidents, the newspapers contain reports of other accidents and suspicious deaths in which deaf people were involved – though they were less the direct result of their hearing impairment. Death by drowning, falling and suicide were also cited as causes of death for deaf persons. In fact, the drowning of research individual Franciscus De Rubbel was reported by the newspaper *Le Bien Public* on March 14, 1863. According to the article, passers-by found his body in a ditch at two o'clock in the morning. Franciscus had probably fallen into the water in the early evening in a drunken fit.<sup>114</sup>

#### 7.4.3.2 Mortality risks from a multivariate perspective

Based on the descriptive statistics mentioned above, we find no evidence of a distinct negative impact of a hearing impairment on a person's lifespan. On the contrary, the survival rates of the deaf men were even higher in the age groups between 26 and 55. By means of event history techniques, the mortality risks of both research cohorts are further explored in this section.

I have designed Cox regression models for the different age groups of men and women separately. These distinctions are based on the observation that mortality risks differed according to sex and age. Besides the presence of an impairment, I have included several other covariates which may have influenced mortality risks.

##### Variables of interest

- *Birth cohort* – Parallel to increasing longevity, I expect a lower risk of dying (prematurely) in the second birth cohort, at least in the higher age groups. The survival chances within the younger age groups may have been similar in the second birth cohort compared to the first birth cohort because of the mid-nineteenth century stagnation in the mortality transition.<sup>115</sup> People born in the first birth cohort (1748-1810) make up the reference category, compared to people born in the second birth cohort (1830-1860).
- *Living environment* – In line with previous mortality research, I expect a higher mortality risk in urban regions. A growing urbanization in combination with precarious sanitary conditions, bad nutrition and working conditions made city dwellers par-

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<sup>114</sup> Article in *Le Bien Public*, March 14, 1863.

<sup>115</sup> See paragraph 2.3.3.; The mortality decline was interrupted by the start of the economic crisis and the process of industrialization in the early nineteenth century. Precarious living and hygiene conditions, bad nutrition and long working hours, in combination with the limited medical knowledge of the period, made mortality rates skyrocket again. From the 1880s onwards, a second and irreversible mortality decline started. The second birth cohort (born 1830-1860) was thus faced with higher mortality rates in young age. By the time they had reached their forties, mortality rates started to decline again.

ticularly susceptible to disease.<sup>116</sup> If this assumption holds, the hazard ratios for the cities should be higher than 1 (the countryside is the reference category). The attribution of a rural or urban living environment to each person is based on the type of setting in which a person spent most time within each age group.<sup>117</sup>

- *Socio-economic status* – The inverse association between socio-economic status and the risk of mortality is one of the most firmly established patterns in the distribution of mortality. In contemporary studies of adult mortality three measures of SES are most commonly used: educational attainment (years of schooling completed), income and for the working age population, occupational status.<sup>118</sup> For historical populations, we only have information on the latter. For each individual, I have selected the occupation with the highest SOCP0 classification within each age category. Therefore, a person's occupational status could differ according to the age group. For example, Jean Francois De Vriendt was included as a tailor in the 16-30 and 30-45 age groups (SOCPO 3: skilled), as a servant in the 45-60 age group (SOCPO 2: semi-skilled) and as unemployed in the category >60 years (code 5: unemployed).<sup>119</sup> If we assume that housing and living conditions improved according to SES, we can expect that the survival chances were highest in the skilled and middle class groups.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> The relation between urbanization and mortality is discussed in: Mooney, G. & Szreter, S. (1998) "Urbanization, Mortality, and the Standard of Living Debate: New Estimates of the Expectation of Life at Birth in Nineteenth-century British Cities" *Economic History Review*, 51/1, 84-112; Depauw, E. & Devos, I. (2014) *Urban Health Penalties. Estimates of Life Expectancies in Belgian Cities, 1846-1900*. Unpublished conference paper presented at the European Society of Historical Demography Conference, Alghero (Sardinia, Italy).

<sup>117</sup> The advantage of this approach is that the analysis takes into account that a person's living environment can change during their life course, as they migrate between rural and urban settings. The downside is that the migration in itself remains unnoticed. According to research by Alter and Oris, the survival chances of migrants to industrial towns in eastern Belgium were better compared to the local people. Oris, M. & Alter, G. (2001) "Paths to the City and Roads to Death. Mortality and Migration in East Belgium During the Industrial Revolution" *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, 3-4, 453-95.

<sup>118</sup> Land, K.C. & Yang, Y. (2011) "Morbidity, Disability, and Mortality" In: Binstock, R.H. & George, L.K. (eds.) *Handbook of Aging and the Social Sciences*. New York: Academic Press, 52.

<sup>119</sup> The SOCP0 classification provides a classification for all occupations, but not for people "without occupation". I therefore introduced code 5 for people who were only registered as "without occupation" within a certain age group. A list of occupations and their respective SOCP0 codes can be consulted in: Van De Putte, B. (2005) *Partnerkeuze in de 19de eeuw: klasse, geografische afkomst, romantiek en de vorming van sociale groepen op de huwelijksmarkt*. Leuven: University Press.

<sup>120</sup> The impact of medical progress and nutrition on the mortality decline has been debated. For more information see: Devos, I. (2006) *Allemaal bestjes*. An overview of the impact of nutrition on a person's susceptibility to specific diseases can be found in: Report of the Conferees (1985) "The Relationship of Nutrition, Disease and Social Conditions: A Graphical Presentation" In: Rotberg, R. & Rabb, T.K. (eds.) *Hunger and History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 308. For more on the impact of SES on health and mortality: Cutler, D.M., Lleras-Muney, A. & Vogl, T. (2011) "Socioeconomic Status and Health: Dimensions and Mechanisms" In: Glied, S. & Smith, P.C. (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Health Economics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- *Civil status* - Several studies have established the presence of a positive association between marital status and mortality: married individuals have a lower mortality.<sup>121</sup> Moreover, the advantages of marriage tend to accumulate with the length of marriage.<sup>122</sup> Studies by researchers such as Frans Van Poppel suggest that both marital selection and social causation stimulated the lower mortality of married persons. The marital selection theory states that healthier persons were more likely to marry, while unhealthy persons made less attractive marriage partners. According to social-causation theory, the effect of marriage on health was mediated by psychosocial factors, such as stress and social relationships, and by material circumstances, such as a better financial situation. Van Poppel states that the adverse effects of being unmarried diminished as the economic role of the family became less important in the twentieth century. However, for most of the nineteenth century men and women were dependent on each other to produce the goods and services essential for their survival.<sup>123</sup> To examine the effect of civil status on mortality risks, I distinguish between unmarried (reference), married and widowed individuals. When a person changed marital status within an age group, the status at the end of the age group was selected.

These covariates represent some of the factors that may affect mortality, but cannot fully explain a person's survival chances.<sup>124</sup> Personal characteristics, such as a person's

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<sup>121</sup> Van den Berg, G.J. & Gupta, S. (2008) *Early Life Conditions, Marital Status, and Mortality*. Unpublished conference paper presented at the Population Association of America, 2. More on mortality rates by marital status in: Trowbridge, C.L. (1994) "Mortality Rates by Marital Status" *Transactions of Society of Actuaries*, 46, 321-89.

<sup>122</sup> Lillard, L.A. & Waite, L.J. (1995) "Til Death Do Us Part: Marital Disruption and Mortality" *American Journal of Sociology*, 100, 1131-56.

<sup>123</sup> Van Poppel, F. (2001) "Long-Term Trends in Marital Status. Mortality Differences in the Netherlands, 1850-1970" *Journal of Biosocial Sciences*, 33, 279-303.

<sup>124</sup> The effect of institutionalization on mortality was not included in the end, because of the low numbers in the sibling cohort and the difficulties of taking into consideration the duration of institutionalization – which undoubtedly influenced its effect. Moreover, many persons may have been sick on arrival at an institution such as a hospital, which casts doubt on the cause-effect relationship. A small test of the effect of institutionalization (only taking into account whether a person was institutionalized or not) for the deaf cohort showed no significant negative or positive effect of institutionalization on mortality. People who spent part of their lives in an institution were not dying sooner or later than those who were not institutionalized. Similarly, we can assume that mortality rates were influenced by the size of a person's social network, which could potentially provide social support. (The relationship between mortality and social networks was confirmed by: Schenk, N. & Van Poppel, F. (2011) "Social Class, Social Mobility and Mortality in the Netherlands, 1850-2004" *Explorations in Economic History*, 48/3, 401-17; Alter, G., Capron, C., Neven, M. & Oris, M. (2002) "When Dad Died: Household Economy and Family Culture in Nineteenth Century East Belgium" In: Derosas, R. & Oris, M. (eds.) *When Dad Died. Individuals and Families Coping with Distress in Past Societies*. Bern: Lang, 389-420.) However, as the dataset does not contain information on the dates of death of all the siblings, it is impossible to know how many si-

health and early life conditions, as well as environmental circumstances, like economic crises and the incidence of epidemics or war, undoubtedly played a role as well. While I cannot account for a person's health, the choice for siblings as control cohorts ensures that both deaf and hearing individuals experienced similar early life conditions, and lived in similar environments.

Cox models measure *duration*, so the reading comes down to the interpretation of relative duration. In practice, however, the common interpretation is as follows: for each categorical variable a reference category is selected. The reference category has a hazard ratio equal to 1. Values lower than 1 are associated with lower risks of experiencing the event of interest. They should be interpreted as *proportional hazards*: this means that a ratio of 0.8 can be perceived as a 20% lower risk of experiencing the event. Likewise, values higher than 1 are associated with higher risks of failure. For example, a value of 1.3 is considered as a 30% higher risk of experiencing the event. The *p-value* column indicates the statistical significance of the hazard ratios. A value lower than 0.1 is considered *moderately significant*, a value lower than 0.05 is *significant* and a value lower than 0.01 is *highly significant*. The hazard ratios with a significant p-value appear in bold. The *distribution* column indicates the representation of each subcategory within the category as a whole (100 percent).

## Results

Table 7.13 presents the results of the Cox regressions for women between the ages of 20 and 50 (model 1) and over 50 (model 2). In model 1, *civil status* was stratified due to non-proportionality issues.<sup>125</sup>

Table 7.13 confirms that the presence of a hearing impairment did not significantly harm a person's survival chances. Nor was there a significant difference according to living environment and socio-economic status.<sup>126</sup> Birth cohort did prove to be significant: the women in the second birth cohort were about 48 (model 1) and 28 percent (model 2) less likely to die in both age groups. For the 20-50 age group, the lower hazard ratio may be a reflection of increasing life expectancy from the 1880s onwards. As more women reached a higher age, fewer women in the second birth cohort died before their 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. Interacting the covariates *disability* and *birth cohort* indicates that both

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blings were alive at certain points in time. Moreover, we have no consistent information on the availability of extended kin.

<sup>125</sup> A stratified model allows the form of the baseline hazard to vary across strata, while the effects of other covariates are assumed time-invariant.

<sup>126</sup> The covariate *living environment* had a significant effect, but how it affected the outcome is unclear when splitting the covariate into the categories *rural* and *urban*.

deaf and hearing women experienced a significant decrease in risk in the second cohort. The lower propensity to die in model 2 has a slightly different explanation. In model 2, all individuals died by the end of observation. Consequently, the covariates did not affect the fact of whether death took place, but the *duration* until death.<sup>127</sup> In old age, everyone – regardless of their living environment, civil status and SES – dies, but some of the covariates may have prolonged a person’s life. Therefore, the significant effect of birth cohort lies not in the higher survival chances of the second birth cohort, but in a longer survival: women in the second birth cohort were more likely to die at an older age. The interaction between the covariates *disability* and *birth cohort* did not provide significant results for model 2, so I cannot make statements for deaf and hearing women separately.

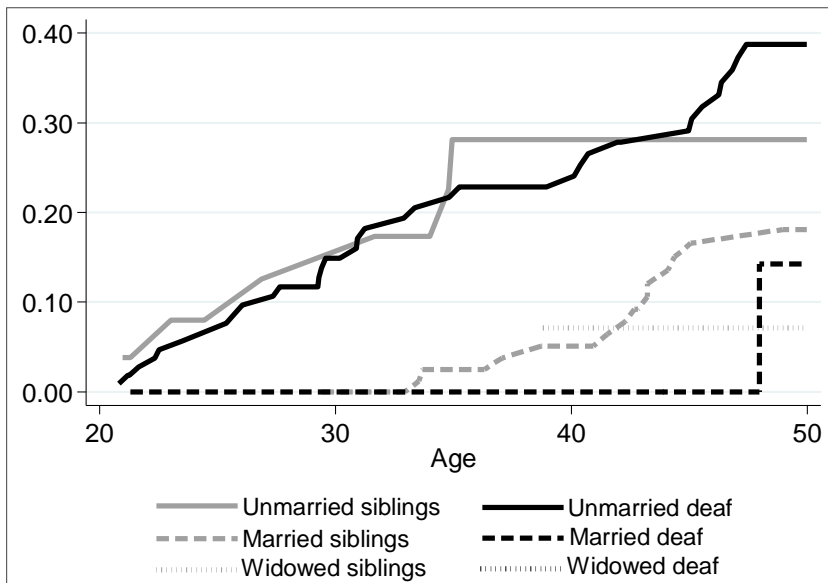
**Table 7.13** Cox regression of the probability of death for women

	Model 1 (20-50 years)			Model 2 (+50 years)		
	Hazard ratio	p-value	Distribution (%)	Hazard ratio	p-value	Distribution (%)
<i>Disability</i>		0.825			0.994	
Hearing (ref.)	1		54.8	1		51.9
Deaf	0.790	0.612	45.2	1.132	0.683	48.1
<i>Birth cohort</i>		0.043			0.078	
Cohort 1 (ref.)	1		47.8	1		53.3
Cohort 2	<b>0.524</b>	0.040	52.2	<b>0.729</b>	0.093	46.7
<i>Living environment</i>		0.021			0.812	
Rural (ref.)	1		69.4	1		71.1
Urban	1.688	0.123	30.6	1.060	0.776	28.9
<i>SES</i>		0.164			0.108	
Unskilled (ref.)	1		8.3	1		9.6
(Semi-)skilled	4.055	0.172	48.4	1.263	0.504	26.7
Middle Class/Elite	1.961	0.536	24.8	0.891	0.739	19.3
Unemployed	4.364	0.166	18.5	0.849	0.612	44.4
<i>Civil status</i>					.620	
Unmarried (ref.)		Stratified	47.8	1		520.6
Married			43.9	1.120	.745	170.8
Widowed			8.3	0.945	.857	290.6
	N individuals: 157 N deaths: 44 Time at risk: 4161.32 Log likelihood: -174.6547 Prob > chi2: 0.0604			N individuals: 135 N deaths: 135 Time at risk: 3098.25 Log likelihood: -527.4269 Prob > chi2: 0.2641		

<sup>127</sup> Cox regressions take into account duration until an event by using age as a time scale.

In model 1, *civil status* was stratified due to non-proportionality issues. In other words, the effect of a woman’s civil status on her mortality risk was not the same at every age (between 20 and 50). However, a person’s civil status did have a significant effect on their propensity to die. To illustrate this effect, figure 7.14 displays the Nelson-Aalen cumulative hazard survival estimates for women between the ages of 20 and 50.

**Figure 7.14** Cumulative hazard survival estimates for the probability of death, women between the ages of 20 and 50, by civil status



Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Figure 7.14 shows that the probably of dying between the ages of 20 and 50 was highest for the unmarried deaf women and sisters. The curves for the married and widowed deaf women are situated at the bottom, indicating that the risk of the married and widowed deaf women dying before their 50<sup>th</sup> birthday was much lower. Therefore, the effect of marriage seems very advantageous. However, keeping the very low number of married and widowed deaf women in mind, we should be cautious about making such statements. Nonetheless, the lower mortality risks of the larger group of married sisters indicates a similar pattern.

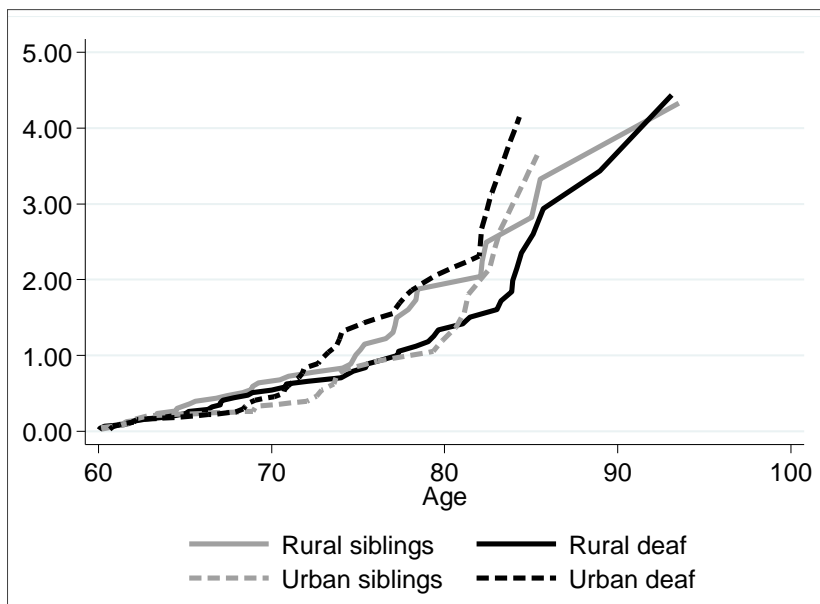
Table 7.14 presents the results for the men according to four age groups: men between 16 and 30 (model 1), between 30 and 45 (model 2), between 45 and 60 (model 3) and men older than 60 (model 4).



In contrast to the female models, table 7.14 indicates a significant difference in the mortality risks of deaf and hearing men between the ages of 16 and 45. Within these age groups, deaf men were 70 to 80 percent less likely to die than their brothers. The explanation behind this huge difference is difficult to assess. As discussed earlier, this difference may be related to the more difficult labour conditions of the hearing brothers. Depauw and Devos have shown that in 1890, within Belgian cities and Belgium as a whole, men at economically active ages had higher risks of dying than women. They related the excess male mortality to the more physically demanding and dangerous working conditions for men.<sup>128</sup> As more deaf men were unemployed or active in less hazardous occupations, this may account for their lower mortality risks compared to the brothers. After the age of 45, the difference between the two research groups becomes smaller and insignificant.

Except for model 2, *birth cohort* had no significant impact on the mortality risks of men. In model 2, comparable to the female models, the propensity to die in the 30-45 age group was smaller in the second birth cohort. Only in model 4 did *living environment* have a significant impact. Because the covariate was stratified due to non-proportionality, I illustrate the effect of living environment by means of a Nelson-Aalen graph (figure 7.15).

**Figure 7.15** Cumulative hazard survival estimates for the probability of death, men older than 60, by living environment



Source: MS Access database, research individual file

<sup>128</sup> Depauw, E. & Devos, I. (2014) *Urban Health Penalties*. After the peak at age 45, differences between men and women decreased again.



Because all the research subjects were dead at the end of observation in model 4, the effect of covariates needs to be interpreted as the risk of dying at a younger age. Thus the higher the curves, the higher the risk of dying younger. The urban deaf curve (dark dashed line) is situated the highest, which indicates that deaf men living in a city had a higher propensity to die at a younger age than those in the countryside (dark solid line). The curves for the brothers are more intertwined, implying that the difference between the countryside and city was less pronounced.

For socio-economic status, we find some significant results across the models. In general, the models indicate that the propensity to die (younger) was lower for people belonging to the middle class/elite, while it was higher for people who were unemployed. In model 4 (>60 years old), we find that the reference category of unskilled workers had the worst prospects as the hazard ratios of all the other categories were lower (below 1). It seems strange that even unemployed people had better survival chances. However, taking into account the age group of this model (over 60), we can assume that those who were unemployed were actually retired. The fact that some men still had to work as unskilled labourers in old age may be an indication of their difficult living conditions, which in turn decreased their survival chances.

The one covariate that was significant throughout all four models is civil status. In models 3 and 4 the covariate is significant as a whole, but how it influenced the outcome is unclear as the subcategories are insignificant. In models 1 and 2 the subcategories of widowed individuals are left blank as they contained too few individuals. Nonetheless, as with the women, we find that the survival chances of married and widowed men were higher than those of unmarried men. In the case of the widowers, the supportive role of their spouses was probably taken over by children, which explains why their survival chances were still better than singles.

#### 7.4.4 Summary

In this section, the mortality characteristics of the research population constituted the focal point. The few available studies on the relationship between deafness and mortality today indicate that congenital deafness has no harmful effect on a person's mortality. In other words, deaf persons are not more likely to die at a younger age. This section aimed at testing this finding on a historical deaf population.

Based on descriptive and multivariate statistics, I showed that this conclusion can be extended into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A calculation of the mean and median ages at death demonstrated that deaf men and women reached even slightly higher ages than their siblings. By distributing the survival rates over age groups, I found that between the ages of 26 and 55 a surplus of brothers died compared to the deaf men. Analogously, the Cox regression indicated significantly lower hazard ratios

for deaf men in the age groups between 16 and 45. Hearing brothers had a higher risk of dying in their most productive years, which may indicate that hearing men were physically taxed more than deaf men. Once they had reached the age of 45, the differences between the deaf and control cohorts became insignificant. In line with rising life expectancy from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, I found a lower propensity to die (younger) in the second birth cohort. This covariate was especially significant for women. The covariate that had the largest impact on both men and women was their civil status. The analyses showed that the duration until death was longest for married individuals and persons that had been married. Analyses in Chapter 4, however, showed that only a small group of deaf people could benefit from the advantages of marriage.

## 7.5 Conclusion

The focus in this chapter has been on institutions, old age and death. In the sibling cohorts, these three life events usually more or less coincided. Those who entered an institution usually only did so in old age and died after a short-term stay. In the deaf cohort, the time between the events was generally longer. More deaf men and women entered an institution at a younger age, and died after a residence of on average 22.8 years. While no person could escape death, institutionalization and living to an old age were not universal. In this chapter, I have explored the circumstances which influenced both events, as well as the living conditions of the institutionalized and the aged. The main focal point in all the analyses was the particularity of the situation for deaf people.

Section 7.2 shed light on the men and women who spent part of their lives in an institution. In the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this group expanded in both the deaf and sibling cohorts. This increase was part of a European institutionalization trend spurred by a more differentiated poverty policy and a medicalization and professionalization of death and disability. More than before, institutions started to direct their attention to specific groups of 'people in need'. Hospitals developed into medical centres for the sick instead of places of refuge, mental institutions became providers of treatment for the mentally ill rather than prison-like environments, and separate hospices were built for the incurable and the elderly. In practice, however, admission policies were probably less strict. This is evidenced by the spread of deaf individuals over the different types of institutions. At the same time, this spread illustrates how deaf people could be viewed as sick, incurable, mentally ill and poor. By means of event history analyses I showed how a person's residence, occupation, civil status and the presence of close relatives could influence a person's likelihood of being institutionalized, especially at a younger age. How a person felt about entering an institution was

more difficult to measure. For many it may have been a circumstantial inevitability, while others may have considered it a 'solution'. Once institutionalized, a person was unlikely to leave the institution again, except maybe for another institution. Contemporary sources suggest that life within an institution entailed complying with strict regulations. Scholars such as Hutchison have therefore claimed that institutional living was hardly a choice. However, the analysis of institutional employment suggested that institutionalization may also have offered some new opportunities.

The living arrangements and retirement ages of elderly people were the points of interest in section 7.3. In the introduction of this chapter, I put forward the assumption by Priestly that older people with impairments were perceived less as *disabled* than impaired children and adults. That is to say, the *otherness* of deaf people might have changed as more people were faced with hearing loss and other limitations in old age. Although the perception might have changed, in real life deaf men and women continued to bear the consequences of their hearing impairment. This became apparent in the living arrangements of the research individuals beyond the age of 60. While the majority of brothers and sisters could rely on the support of a spouse and children in old age, deaf people had to rely more on siblings and, as the siblings themselves grew old too, on the support of non-kin and the community (through institutionalization). Living alone seems to have been less of an option prior to the twentieth century. The lack of universal pension schemes was an important obstacle in this regard. Nowadays people can be retired for one-quarter of their lives. In contrast, elderly people in the past had no other option than to work as long as possible. A comparison of the average retirement ages with the ages at death showed that both occurred more or less at the same time. The working ages of deaf people were slightly lower compared to the siblings, which probably results from the higher institutionalization rate among the deaf. It may also reflect the lower employment opportunities of deaf people in old age, similar to their higher unemployment in adulthood.

Whereas deafness has proved to influence the potential of people in life in a negative way, in death the presence of an auditory impairment was of no importance. Mortality risks did depend on other characteristics though, such as a person's birth cohort, unemployment and civil status. As deaf individuals were more often unemployed and unmarried, the logical consequence would be that they had a higher propensity to die prematurely. However, deaf people were not likely to die younger than their siblings. This suggests that other factors may be at play as well. The death surplus of brothers between the ages of 26 and 55 points to worse working conditions for non-deaf men, which may have counteracted the beneficial effects of marriage. Fewer deaf men had the advantage of marriage, but the support of relatives and their higher employment rates in less physically challenging occupations may have acted as valuable alternatives.

## Conclusions

Joseph Vercauteren was born deaf in the rural village of Bazel in May 1786. He was the sixth child of Jan and Catharina Van Royen. Together with his hearing brother Bernardus, the young Joseph helped his father, who was a baker. In 1812, when he was 25, Joseph married Angelina Pauwels, a 23-year-old woman who grew up in the same village. Most likely, she was not deaf. After marriage, Joseph and his wife started a new household, providing for their livelihoods as labourers, which was a common occupation in this polder village. Within a month of marriage, their first son Charles Alexander was born. In the period between 1813 and 1831, the couple had ten more children. Unfortunately, three of them died as infants. One son died at age 30. Before Joseph's death in 1855, three of his children had married. The four others stayed in his house and contributed to the household income as labourers. Joseph died when he was 68. At the time, he was still head of the household and living with his spouse and four unmarried children.

Marie Therese Verpoort was born deaf as the third child of Joseph and Caroline La Conte, in April 1844. Living in the village of Zulzeke, in the heart of the linen-oriented Flemish inland, she grew up in a household in which resources from agriculture were combined with a supplementary income from the cottage industry. In April 1852, when she was 8, Marie Therese left her home and entered the *Institut des Sourdes-Muettes* in Ghent. She stayed in the institution until the summer of 1862. Taking into account that pupils of the deaf school only occasionally went home, Marie Therese was probably absent when her mother died in January 1862. Although her father was still alive at the time of her graduation, she did not return home. Instead, she entered the *Hospice des Incurables*, managed by the Sisters of Charity and located in the same street as the deaf school. She lived in the institution until 1881. That year, she changed residence and moved to the Sint-Jozef Asylum, a mental institution, also located in Ghent and governed by the Sisters of Charity. When the facility moved to the neighbouring town of Melle in 1908, Marie Therese moved as well. She died in the institution in 1916, aged 72.

Uncovering the experiences of disabled persons has been identified as one of the greatest challenges for disability historians today. Although historical disability research has accelerated rapidly in the last decades, the main focus has been on the history of institutional, educational and medical practices. Despite the value of these critical institutional approaches, the question as to how disabled individuals themselves experienced living with an impairment became increasingly pertinent. Pieter Verstraete rightly argued that the emancipatory role of disability history consists in visualizing the variety of lived experiences of people with disabilities.<sup>1</sup>

This study has taken up this challenge with empirical research into the lives of prelingual deaf people living in the province of East Flanders from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century. Deaf people, together with blind persons, were the first to have special schools and to be counted in national censuses. From early on in history, they have been the focus of intensive academic, educational and medical attention and debate.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the early reference to prelingual deafness ('deaf-mutism') in historical sources enables to identify deaf people through time. My choice for a deaf research population implied the implicit recognition of individuals with a hearing impairment as disabled. This consideration touches on an ongoing debate about the issue of whether deafness should be considered a disability or merely an alternative way of communicating. The results in this study have shown that the equation was justified as deafness had a disabling effect on a person's life in the past. However, by no means does this imply that the experiences of deaf people can simply be equated with those of people with other types of impairments.

The first chapter of my study showed that there have been successful attempts to uncover the lived experiences of deaf men and women in the past. However, there have also been significant limitations. A common feature of many of the historical studies today is their limited range. In some cases, articles tell the story of one deaf person. Others have access to information that is limited to a specific group within the deaf population, including restrictions with regard to gender, age and social class, or to a specific phase in life, such as shortly after graduation or in times of wrongdoing. My study is exceptional in its focus on the entire life course of a large group of deaf individuals. Moreover, disability historians often turn to institutional source materials. As a result, disabled persons appear as objects of medical surveillance, as recipients of charity, or as subjects of state disciplinary action. I, on the other hand, managed to identify

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<sup>1</sup> Verstraete, P. (2008) *Disability History: A Foucauldian Perspective*. Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 42.

<sup>2</sup> Branson, J. & Miller, D. (2002) *Damned for Their Difference: The Cultural Construction of Deaf People as Disabled: A Sociological History*. Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 59.

deaf men and women in a varied set of historical sources: military conscription registers, provincial individual bulletins, a list entitled *Staat van alle de stomme-dooven welke zig bevinden in de provincie Oost-Vlaanderen*, grant applications, the admission list of the *Institut Royal des Sourdes-Muettes* and population registers which enabled the identification of the male pupils of the *Institut Royal des Sourds-Muets*. These sources provided me with a sample of 284 deaf persons born in different generations and regions, from all socio-economic groups and both genders. Comparisons with the total deaf population established the numerical importance of my research population.

The life courses of these 284 deaf men and women were subsequently reconstructed from birth until death through linkage with historical demographic sources such as parish and civil registers and population registers. I consulted the parish registers and civil certificates from 1796 to 1870 in the State Archive of Beveren. Certificates from 1870 to the present are kept in the archive of the registry office in each municipality. As 251 research persons survived beyond 1870, the life course reconstruction led me to search for these individuals in over 50 municipal archives. The time-consuming nature of this undertaking may explain why comparable historical disability research has been rare so far. The life course data was expanded by other sources, written from both a quantitative and a qualitative perspective. From a quantitative perspective, the individual-level data were compared with statistical data on an aggregate provincial and national level. Contemporary publications and newspaper articles were used to qualitatively frame the research.

Present-day and historical disability research is permeated with weighty concepts such as integration and exclusion, stigmatization and vulnerability. These are broad and multifaceted notions and the extent to which they can be applied to people with disabilities is difficult to assess. *Exclusion* processes can take shape in different ways, through elimination, segregation, assistance and discrimination. *Integration* refers to participation both in a formal way, such as in the access to the labour and marriage market, and in an informal way, such as in being socially accepted and able to develop social relationships. Similarly, *vulnerability* can be the outcome of the difficulties inherent in being disabled, of the contingent maladjustment of society and of the widely ascribed belief that people with disabilities are generally helpless. By combining quantitative information about the ways in which the life courses of deaf people were structured, qualitative sources such as newspapers that reflect attitudes towards deaf people, and publications discussing the organization of institutional care, medical beliefs and legislation, I have shed light on what deaf persons were excluded from and what they were included in, and how and to what extent they were left out at different times and in different social groupings.

My study has shown that being deaf could render people more vulnerable, isolated and excluded in various ways. However, as the life trajectories of Joseph and Marie Therese

perfectly illustrate, the life paths of deaf people were equally dependent on personal and environmental factors other than the presence of an impairment. While Joseph and Marie Therese were both 'deaf-mute', their lives could not have been more different. Joseph's life course suggests he lived a rather ordinary life as a full member of the community of Bazel. Similar to the general hearing population at the time, Joseph married, worked and set up an independent household. In contrast, the life course of Marie Therese was more out of the ordinary. From her early childhood until the day she died, Marie Therese lived in an institution, in an unfamiliar city more than 30 kilometres away from her family. She never married and was always reported as unemployed. Despite the shared experience of being deaf, Joseph and Marie Therese had many different features. Joseph was a man, born in the late eighteenth century, who lived in a polder region and grew up while both his parents were alive. Marie Therese was a woman, born in the mid-nineteenth century, who lived in a linen-oriented region in crisis and had lost her mother at age 17. The stories of Joseph and Marie Therese show that disability experiences take shape within a broader framework of variables such as gender, environment, household composition and a specific time frame with its own economic, political, social and cultural features. Apparently Joseph had the right prerequisites for overcoming his more vulnerable starting position in life as a result of being born deaf, while Marie Therese did not. Therefore, the relationship between being deaf and being vulnerable and excluded is not an inescapable one, but the product of specific environments. This social approach to disability lay at the basis of this study.

The tension between the uniqueness of individual behaviour and experiences on the one hand and general social patterns on the other is central to the life course paradigm. In the field of disability history, the life course approach is largely uncharted territory, probably due to the limited opportunities for identifying disabled individuals in historical sources and the time-consuming nature of the method. Nonetheless, the methodology offers interesting opportunities for historical disability research and fitted the purpose of my study perfectly. Life course analysis allowed me to distinguish patterns and 'average' life trajectories, while not losing track of more individual responses to impairment and issues of individual agency. Moreover, by using event history analysis, the statistical analysis on which most life course analyses are based, I could determine the extent to which a life course was determined by the presence of a hearing impairment, or by (a combination of) other life characteristics, such as gender, social class and living environment.

The time frame in which the deaf subjects lived has been of particular interest in this research. I started from the assumption put forward by historical materialism that the material and ideological changes that accompanied the emergence of an industrial capitalist society, coupled with the increased medical interpretation of disabilities, made people with disabilities increasingly vulnerable to segregation, stigmatization and insti-

tutionalization. According to Michael Oliver, people with an impairment were relatively well integrated within the early modern community and family.<sup>3</sup> In the nineteenth century, however, the social position of people with a disability came under serious threat. From that point onwards, the great majority of disabled persons would not have had an occupation, but were instead faced with limited social interaction and exclusion. According to Vic Finkelstein, it was not until the 1980s that this state of oppression started to diminish.<sup>4</sup> Whereas this theory has not been free from criticism from disability scholars and historians, there have been limited attempts to verify it and to analyse the specific living situations of disabled people in pre-industrial and industrial societies. The observation made by disability scholar Brendan Gleeson fifteen years ago that “*there is pressing need for empirically grounded research on the social experience of disabled people in nearly all historical societies*”<sup>5</sup>, is still remarkably relevant today. The time frame of my research, 1750-1950, made it possible to test the extent to which the nineteenth century can be considered a break from the eighteenth century.

My objective to uncover the experiences of deaf people in the interaction between personal characteristics and the context and time they lived in was operationalized in terms of two main questions which constituted the backbone of this research. First, to what extent did the lives of the deaf differ from the hearing population? And second, in what way were their life courses negatively influenced by nineteenth-century developments? The first research question required comparing the lives of a group of deaf and non-deaf persons from the same generation. I chose the deaf persons’ siblings as they shared the same early life characteristics that potentially influenced future life trajectories. This provided me with a reliable control group. The second research question involved the comparison of two generations. The men and women in this study were either born between 1748 and 1810, or between 1830 and 1860. I made the distinction between the two birth cohorts according to the industrial development of Belgium in order to divide the research population into a pre-industrial and more industrial cohort. As industrialization is a process that runs a differentiated course in time and speed, I subdivided the industrial cohort into categories of people living in industrial, semi-industrial and non-industrial villages based on agricultural and industrial censuses.

In line with contemporary studies into integration, I dealt with the two main research questions in five thematic chapters. Each of these chapters focused on a set of key events in a person’s life course such as growing up, making a career for oneself, finding

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<sup>3</sup> Oliver, M. (1990) *The Politics of Disablement. A Sociological Approach*. New York: St. Martin’s Press.

<sup>4</sup> Finkelstein, V. (1981) “Disability and the Helper/Helped Relationship. An Historical View” In: Liddiard, P., Brechin, A. & Swain, J. (eds.) *Handicap in a Social World: A Reader*. Sevenoaks: Hodder and Stoughton, 12-22.

<sup>5</sup> Gleeson, B.(1997) “Disability Studies: A Historical Materialist View” *Disability & Society*, 12/2, 196.



a partner in life, developing a personal network of family and friends, growing old and dying. By focusing on this wide range of topics, my study links up with many avenues of historical inquiry such as poverty, employment, industrialization, the importance of family systems, migration, aging and mortality. Using disability as an analytical framework allowed me to address these issues from a new and more differentiated perspective.

To what extent did the lives of deaf people differ from those of hearing people and how did their living situation change with nineteenth-century developments? The results in this study indicate that the answer to this question is not straightforward, but dependent on factors such as the type of life event and the interaction of deafness with personal and contextual characteristics. Nonetheless, based on the research results, I can construct a few *standardized* biographies and formulate some general conclusions.

## **Deaf lives on the rack**

My research has shown that the chances of deaf men and women to live an 'ordinary' life were significantly compromised by the direct and indirect consequences of their impairment. Most crucial in this regard were their difficulties on the labour and marriage market. I showed that more deaf individuals, deaf women in particular, were unemployed at least once in their lives – and more often on a structural basis. Moreover, unemployment occurred much earlier compared to the hearing population, at an age which was well below the average age of retirement. These findings are an important indication of the economic discrimination faced by deaf people. However, the higher unemployment was not necessarily an indication that deaf people were unfit to participate in the labour market as a direct result of their disability. Indeed, I showed that deafness was less of a hindrance for a number of occupations. The similarities in the employment pattern of the deaf and hearing population with an occupation in the eighteenth century confirmed the ability of deaf people to take up regular occupations. Important exceptions were occupations that required communication skills. The deaf were less represented in occupations in trade, transport and administration, in contrast to the hearing population, for whom employment in these sectors became increasingly important in the course of the nineteenth century. The higher incidence of unemployment was probably an indirect result of their impairment. More specifically, I uncovered a relationship between unemployment and a person's living arrangements that was different for the two research groups. While hearing sisters were mostly registered unem-

ployed when living in matrimony with their husbands, deaf men and women were more often institutionalized or living in with relatives.<sup>6</sup> Living with family or in an institution may have diminished the need and opportunities for deaf individuals to find employment outside the home or institution. In this regard, I showed that living in with relatives was strongly correlated to the absence of a formal occupation in the sources. Deaf persons living in with relatives most likely contributed to the family business in an informal way, for example by assisting in farm work, taking care of cattle, weaving and spinning, which was not picked up by civil officials. Thus, being registered as without occupation did not necessarily imply that deaf men and women led passive lives. Similarly, I indicated that people in an institution were stimulated to engage in household activities and jobs, but that these activities often found no expression in the sources.

I also examined the position of deaf men and women on the marriage market and showed that whereas more than two-thirds of the hearing siblings entered marriage and set up a predominantly nuclear household, less than one in five deaf persons followed this traditional path of life. The number of deaf persons marrying was low, and those 48 deaf persons who did marry did so at a considerably older age and more often to an 'unequal' spouse. However, once the critical threshold of getting married was crossed, the lives of the deaf were more or less similar to those of the hearing. I found that the deaf and hearing couples exhibited no differences in the interval between births (*spacing*) or in the timing of the end of childbirth (*stopping*). Deaf couples did have fewer children on average, but this proved to be solely the result of their higher average age at marriage. Deaf widow(er)s were equally successful – or unsuccessful in the case of widows – on the remarriage market than the hearing widow(er)s. I have related the success of deaf men on the remarriage market (in contrast to first marriages) to the prevalence of prejudices about the unsuitability of the deaf marrying. Once they had been married a first time, however, there was less doubt about their abilities to take up their role in marital life.

I argued that being deaf had both a direct and indirect impact on a person's marriage chances. On the one hand, they probably encountered difficulties in establishing personal relationships with future spouses due to restrictions in their communication. This social barrier is most difficult to grasp as it left few traces in the source materials. Communication difficulties may have encouraged deaf individuals to look for a spouse who was deaf as well. Nonetheless, the majority of the deaf in my study married a hearing spouse. The fact that most of the deaf research individuals were young in the period before the deaf community and deaf clubs were fully developed, probably limited the opportunities to meet other deaf individuals. The low marriage chances may also have

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<sup>6</sup> The numbers of unemployed hearing brothers were too small to formulate conclusions in this regard, which is in itself a telling fact.

been the direct outcome of the negative attitudes of their environment towards deaf marriages, in line with the eugenic set of ideas and debates on the hereditariness of deafness in the nineteenth century. On the other hand, the lower marriage prospects were also indirectly related to their deafness. For example, through the difficulties they encountered on the labour market and their higher institutionalization. My analyses showed that deaf individuals without an occupation had the lowest marriage rates. In addition, nearly a quarter of the deaf were institutionalized before the end of marriageable age (50), at an average age of 33 – well before they had made the most of their marriage opportunities.

The unequal access of deaf men and women to the labour and marriage market determined their future living conditions and options. Instead of setting up a new household and earning a living for one's family, most deaf people had to adopt alternative survival strategies. Close relatives and institutions constituted the most important support systems for deaf singles.

I showed that more than two-thirds of the deaf singles relied on their parents for as long as possible. The company, free housing and mutual support may have been important incentives for parents and single children to keep living together. When both parents had died, deaf singles usually turned to one or more siblings. Most of them continued to live in the parents' house which they shared with other unmarried siblings, while a smaller proportion went to live in the household of a married brother or sister. The analysis of the family witnesses at death also confirmed that parents and siblings made up the most important family relations. This dependency on parents and siblings was not characteristic of the deaf alone, as it was also the dominant strategy of hearing singles. However, when co-residence with parents or siblings was no longer possible, differences between the deaf and hearing singles did emerge. In this case, deaf singles usually entered an institution, while more hearing singles lived in a single person household or with non-relatives. Moreover, about 18 percent of the deaf singles entered an institution while they still had one or both their parents and/or living siblings. It was difficult to determine whether institutionalization was the result of the unwillingness of relatives to co-reside with a deaf family member. The much higher percentage of deaf singles leaving their parents' house prematurely in the economically struggling districts of Ghent and Oudenaarde suggested that financial considerations played a part as well.

My study confirmed that institutionalization was much more frequent among the deaf. A third of the deaf compared to 14 percent of the siblings were institutionalized during their lives. The fact that disabled people were entitled to free support in an institution, while able-bodied people were not – with the exception of the sick and elderly – undoubtedly contributed to the higher institutionalization rate of the deaf. In this way, institutionalization was a direct outcome of the presence of a hearing impairment. Moreover, I argued that institutionalization was the result of an indirect impact of being

deaf. Bivariate and multivariate analyses indicated that institutionalization was to an important extent determined by the available 'pool' of relatives: individuals were more likely to enter an institution if they had no siblings, were single and had lost their parents before their 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. Besides the importance of family networks, socio-economic status also proved important as individuals without employment were more likely to enter an institution. Thus, the lower marriage rates and the higher incidence of unemployment stimulated the institutionalization of the deaf. Siblings on the other hand, more often had family to fall back on in periods of economic distress and were, therefore less likely to enter an institution. I found that most institutionalized siblings only entered an institution in old age, when they were widowed and/or no longer able to work. My study revealed that deaf people entered a wide range of institutions, which illustrated the undifferentiated admission policy of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century institutions, but also the different views on deaf people as poor, incurable, and even mentally ill. Once institutionalized, it was unlikely that a person would leave the institution.

Deaf men and women continued to bear the consequences of their hearing impairment in old age. While the majority of brothers and sisters could rely on the support of a spouse and children in old age, deaf people had to rely more on siblings and, as the siblings themselves grew old too, on the support of non-kin and the community (through institutionalization). However, whereas deafness proved to influence the potential of people in life in a negative way, I showed that in death the presence of an auditory impairment was of no importance. Mortality risks did depend on other characteristics though, such as a person's birth cohort, unemployment and civil status. As deaf individuals were more often unemployed and unmarried, the logical consequence would be that they had a higher propensity to die prematurely. Yet, deaf people were not likely to die sooner than their siblings. I argued that the support of relatives may have acted as a valuable alternative to a spouse. Moreover, although the large number of institutionalized deaf men and women had less freedom, they always had a roof over their heads and enough to eat. People living on their own could do as they pleased, but more often fell prey to economic difficulties and had to take up more physically challenging occupations, which were detrimental to their survival.

## **A nineteenth-century turn for the worse?**

The lives of deaf people differed from those of hearing people in the sense they were generally more likely to be unemployed, unmarried and institutionalized. However, my study indicated that the difficulties experienced by deaf men and women were not created by nineteenth-century developments. In fact, the lives of the deaf were not neces-

sarily better before industrialization and nineteenth-century changes were not all for the worse. The hypothesis that the nineteenth century can be considered a *dark century* for the deaf, as opposed to a *golden age* in the eras before, therefore needs reconsideration.

In the course of the nineteenth century, the marriage rates of deaf people came down, while their unemployment rates went up. However, the deterioration was not unique to the deaf population and not necessarily related to industrialization processes. In the course of the nineteenth century, the number of deaf men who entered marriage almost halved. However, the marriage rates of the hearing brothers came down as well. Moreover, based on a comparison of the probability of marriage according to the level of industrialization, I showed that living in an industrial setting even contributed to the marriage opportunities of deaf men. This can probably be explained by the fact that most industrial municipalities were urbanized regions. I have argued that cities were more accustomed to disabled individuals and provided more opportunities for deaf people to meet through education and recreation. The marriage rates of deaf women even tripled in the second half of the nineteenth century from nearly 4 to 12 percent. There is no clear indication as to why deaf women were more successful on the nineteenth-century marriage market. In contrast, marriage rates among the hearing sisters came down by 12 percent.

Simultaneously, unemployment and poverty rates in the deaf population rose. This suggests that employment opportunities for the deaf deteriorated. However, unemployment also increased in the general hearing population. Moreover, in the pre-industrial cohort employment opportunities for the deaf were hardly better as their unemployment rates were about twenty times as high as in the hearing population. Unemployment did prove to be higher in industrial areas compared to semi-industrial and non-industrial areas, for deaf men in particular. Yet, a comparison of the unemployment rates in the industrial municipalities with those of the cities in the pre-industrial period indicated little difference between them. Therefore, I argued that the higher unemployment rates of the deaf in industrial towns were not the immediate result of industrial transformations, but rather characteristic of cities. One counter-argument, in favour of the deterioration assumption, is that it probably meant something very different to be an unemployed disabled person in the pre-industrial era than in the nineteenth century when the value of paid labour became a principal source of valorization. Whereas people engaged in unpaid domestic production were considered 'at work' in the eighteenth century, this was no longer the case in the nineteenth century.

While the distribution over occupational sectors was more or less parallel for the deaf and hearing in the pre-industrial cohort, differences between the two groups became more apparent in the second birth cohort. However, the changes did not necessarily entail a deterioration for the deaf. The number of deaf men and women working as an

unskilled labourer, an insecure job that was dependent on day-to-day vacancies, declined in the second half of the nineteenth century. This fall is quite striking as wage labour became more common among the siblings and in the population in general. Simultaneously, more deaf men and women worked as servants and clothing craftspeople – which can be considered less insecure and more highly skilled occupations. The vocational training provided by the expanding nineteenth-century deaf education system proved to be the influential factor here.

In the assessment of a nineteenth-century deterioration, deaf schools play an ambiguous role. On the one hand, they opened new doors for deaf people, and on the other hand they stimulated a process of institutionalization and segregation.

My study illustrated how the organization of deaf schools changed public opinion about deaf people by showing that deaf people were not automatically ‘dumb’. Schooling was believed to render deaf persons to society and turn them into productive and morally upright individuals. Several qualitative sources indicated the high reputation that deaf schools had among the general public. Moreover, deaf schools brought deaf persons into contact with each other. More than three-quarters of the deaf children in this research were born in a family in which they were most likely the only deaf person. Although most families must have developed a rudimentary system of signs enabling basic communication, deaf children’s experience of seeing other family members communicating easily while they could not join in, must have been frustrating and lonely. The development of deaf schools in Belgium in the early nineteenth-century provided a solution for easing these feelings of solitude. Deaf schools made possible the development of a deaf community with its own language, organization and cultural traditions. The establishment of several deaf clubs, usually in the immediate surroundings of a deaf school, reflected this process of identity formation. In this sense, the social opportunities of the mid-nineteenth-century cohort were probably much better than for many of the deaf individuals born in the pre-industrial cohort. Moreover, the vocational training provided in the deaf schools enabled a large number of deaf people to trade a highly insecure occupation, such as a labourer, for a more prestigious one, such as a clothing artisan.

However, the outcome of the development of deaf schools proved not to be unilaterally positive. Attending a deaf school implied deaf children had to leave their homes. So, instead of working alongside family and living among neighbours, they were removed from their homes and workplaces and became ‘inmates’ of an institution and objects of study. The increase in the number of unrelated witnesses at death in the second half of the nineteenth century reflects this alienation process. Moreover, the attendance of a deaf school facilitated the transition from one institution to another. A third of the men who attended a deaf school compared to a fifth of the uneducated men were institutionalized later in life. The life course of Marie Therese exemplifies the same trajectory.

The increasing number of deaf men and women who entered an institution in the nineteenth century is a more explicit indication that conditions for the deaf deteriorated as, in line with the typology of Ravaud and Stiker discussed<sup>7</sup>, they were progressively more excluded by segregation and assistance. My study indicated that the living conditions in an institution were often rigid, which suggests that entering an institution was probably not the outcome of a willing decision. In the course of the nineteenth century, the percentage of institutionalized deaf men and women rose from a fifth to nearly half the deaf population. Moreover, whereas those born before 1810 spent on average 11 years in an institution, those born between 1830 and 1860 were institutionalized for 24 years on average. The increase in the number of deaf people who spent (part of) their lives in an institution in the course of the nineteenth century can hardly be denied. Nonetheless, institutionalization rates also went up in the sibling cohort, although less substantially, as the number of siblings who spent time in an institution increased from 6 percent to 21 percent. Therefore, the increase in institutionalization of the deaf was part of a more general European institutionalization trend spurred by a more differentiated poverty policy and a medicalization and professionalization of death and disability. Moreover, the statement that there was an evolution from informal care from relatives and the extended family to institutions proved to be an exaggeration. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the vast majority of deaf individuals relied on parents and siblings for as long as possible. Entering an institution was often a last resort, when a deaf person had few relatives with whom co-residence was possible – because they were old, deceased or had migrated – or because a household faced financial difficulties.

## **‘The’ deaf experience?**

The life stories of Joseph and Marie Therese clearly illustrate that there is no such thing as *the* deaf experience. Throughout the different chapters, it became clear that some deaf men and women were more successful than others in overcoming the barriers with which they were faced. Personal and contextual characteristics such as a person’s living environment, family situation and socio-economic background could either improve or reduce their chances in life.

In this regard, I showed that having a hearing impairment together with a low socio-economic status resulted in very low marriage opportunities, while having a skilled job

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<sup>7</sup> Ravaud, J.F. & Stiker, H.J. (2001) “Inclusion/Exclusion: An Analysis of Historical and Cultural Meanings” In: Seelman, K.D., Albrecht, G.L. & Bury, M. (eds.) *Handbook of Disability Studies*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 490-514.

could somewhat improve a deaf person's marriage eligibility. Moreover, more deaf individuals who were born and residing in an urban town entered marital life, especially in comparison to deaf migrants. The urban marriage market seems to have been more open-minded and accessible to deaf men and women, especially in the course of the nineteenth century. However, the beneficial effect of urbanization was undone if a person was living in an institution. Deaf individuals living in the polder districts were also more often married than those living in sandy areas, as were deaf persons with older siblings compared to first-borns.

Similarly, event history analyses indicated that a person's living conditions determined their likelihood of being institutionalized, especially at a younger age. It was more likely for a deaf person to be institutionalized if they were born in the city, which is probably connected to the larger number and wider variety of institutions in urban centres. The higher urban institutionalization rate probably also accounts for the higher unemployment rates for urban deaf people compared to those living in rural areas. Likewise, it can be assumed that the more difficult living conditions and the larger population size in the cities made city dwellers less open-minded to the professional integration of disabled individuals. Institutionalization rates among the deaf also differed according to the availability of close relatives and a person's employment opportunities. In addition, the linen districts showed evidence of a higher institutionalization rate, probably the outcome of the proximity of a strong institutional system for the deaf and the difficulties faced by families in the cottage industry in the mid-nineteenth century.

Besides the importance of a person's living circumstances, a person's chances in life are also to a certain extent determined by their personalities, the choices they make and the goals they pursue – their so-called *agency*. Given the impossibility of interviews and the lack of ego-documents, the capacities and life choices of individuals in the past are very difficult to ascertain. Yet some of the life stories in my study showed that people who shared similar living conditions could lead significantly different lives. For example, the early life characteristics of Edmond Francois Bresous, born deaf in Ghent in 1853, showed much resemblance to those of Pierre Thysebaert, born in Ghent in 1842. Both had hearing parents working as craftspeople, who only passed away when Edmond Francois and Pierre were in their late thirties. Both attended the *Institut Royal des Sourds-Muets*, in the 1850s and 1860s. However, Pierre entered an institution immediately after his graduation in 1867 and remained institutionalized until his death in 1913. Edmond Francois, on the other hand, married a deaf woman and became an important figure in the Ghent deaf community as chairman of *De Maatschappij der Doofstommen de Abt de l'Epée* (The Society of Deaf-mutes of Abbé de l'Epée) in Ghent. Although we are left to wonder why the lives of Edmond Francois and Pierre took such different paths, the leading role of Edmond Francois in the deaf community in Ghent points to a strong person-



ality, which may have made it easier for him to transcend his more vulnerable position as a deaf person.

Yet, even though some features were identified as either more advantageous or detrimental, the generally higher number of unmarried, unemployed and institutionalized deaf individuals indicates that the restrictions an impairment imposed on a person's chances in life were not easily overcome.

## Possibilities for future disability history research

This dissertation has focused on the life courses of people with one type of impairment, within a particular time frame and a specific region. However, I believe it can offer some directions for future disability research, both with regard to its framework and methodology.

Concepts such as *integration*, *vulnerability*, *inequality* and *ordinariness* took a key position in this study. These concepts implied asking questions about what it meant to be different and how this was translated into, among other things, social relationships, legal institutions, social welfare and the public's range of ideas. In this way, my research offered more insight into the manner in which all communities function according to processes of exclusion and inclusion. These processes proved not to be independent of time and context. In line with the historical materialist mind-set, I showed that what it meant to be deaf was in an important way determined by the socio-economic framework in which a person lived, and how this framework evolved in time. However, historical materialism proved to be inadequate for accounting for the wide variety of experiences of disablement. I proved that the experiences of deaf men and women were equally defined by differences *within* a socio-economic context, by cultural dimensions and the presence of a hearing impairment *in itself*. This study has shown how deafness interacted with additional social categories such as gender and social class, and how experiences of deaf persons developed according to perceptions regarding their reasonableness, morality and normality. Everyday experiences were also determined by the physical limitations of being deaf, regardless of time and space, expressed in the difficulties that deaf people experienced in communicating and therefore developing social contacts with the hearing world.<sup>8</sup> By combining collective life stories with individual histories, while taking

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<sup>8</sup> In some exceptional communities, such as Martha's vineyard described by Nora Groce, deafness constituted no problem for communication as everyone spoke sign language. (Groce, N. (1985) *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language: Hereditary Deafness on Martha's Vineyard*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.) In most societies,

into consideration both personal characteristics and environmental factors, this study has engaged in an experiential and differentiated approach, as proposed by the critics of historical materialism. The need to understand people with disabilities within a broad analytical framework is crucial for any research into experiences of disablement, both in past and present societies.

Similarly, my study has demonstrated the added value of historical demography and the life course methodology for revealing experiences of people with disabilities. Because of the difficulties in identifying people with an impairment in historical sources, many studies into deaf people have so far focused on the experiences of a small group of deaf persons, with a strong bias towards institutionalized or elite lives. However, I have demonstrated that it is possible, through the creative use of demographic source materials, to catch a glimpse of the ‘invisible’ men and women with an impairment, those who did not stand out because of their wealth or achievements. Moreover, the fact that demographic sources offer information about the life trajectories of both impaired and able-bodied people allowed me to make reliable comparisons for key events in life, such as making a career, finding a partner in life, developing a personal network of family and friends, and entering, leaving and belonging to different households. As I approached the information in the demographic sources from a life course perspective, I could determine how a person’s experiences differed across the successive phases of life and built on previous life experiences (*lifespan development*). I demonstrated how individual characteristics interacted with family networks and specific locations. Therefore, life course analysis enabled me to steer away from the image of disabled people as a *single, clearly defined group* in contrast to an *able* majority.

In addition to its predominantly quantitative approach, my study also showed the possibilities of qualitative source materials, such as newspaper articles, for historical disability research. More than the nineteenth-century publications of scientists and educationalists which are more commonly studied, newspapers present the views and concerns shared by a larger part of society. In this way, newspaper articles revealed some of the ideas and perceptions of the hearing regarding the deaf. For example, by the use of expressions such as “unfortunate” to describe deaf persons and the choice of topics regarding deafness, such as the question whether deaf people should be allowed to marry. Moreover, the factual information in the articles provided insight into the daily experiences of certain deaf men and women, such as their higher risk of being involved in traffic accidents. Following the principles of discourse analysis, newspapers present an

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however, we can assume that deaf men and women were faced with difficulties in communication, directly related to their inability to hear and speak.

interesting source for future disability research, as a way to uncover some of the views of general society regarding people with different types of impairments.

Yet, as in many historical studies, this research was faced with an important drawback. The difficulty of finding personal documents that predate the twentieth century and contain the voices of deaf persons themselves implies that we remain largely ignorant about the ways in which deaf people themselves coped with their impairment. In the period under study, the belief grew that deaf people could and needed to be made 'normal' – thus as hearing as possible – to 'restore' them to the hearing world. However, starting from the perspective of deaf persons, we can question whether being 'normal' was the desire of deaf men and women, let alone whether they considered themselves to be 'abnormal'. In the future, in-depth searches for these personal voices in archival sources such as the Archives Louis-Carton (Bruges) and the KADOC Documentation and Research Centre for Religion, Culture and Society (Leuven) may help to answer this question. As for now, I believe it is fair to conclude that deaf men and women at least aspire(d) to have the same chances in life as hearing people. The present case study has provided empirical evidence indicating that this was not the case in many aspects of life. At the same time, it acts as an invitation to future researchers to further unravel the lives and stories of people with disabilities – from all possible points of view – so as to give them their rightful place in history.

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# Appendix

See attached CD for the following appendices:

1. Endnote literature database (including keyword search)
2. Newspaper articles: index and folders with photographs (classified per newspaper)
3. MS Access database: research individual files (+subfiles) and parental household files
4. MS Access database: episode file & tables created for the thematic analyses (classified per chapter).

Also included: overview of the HISCO and SOCPO codes for each occupation  
(See 'Coding-Combined' in 'Main tables')

## Chapter 2

**Table A.1** Occupational structure of the East Flemish countryside, in %

District	Agriculture	Unsk. labour	Textile	Crafts	Trade & Transp.	Adm. & prof.	Not prod.
Aalst	48.5	10.1	12.5	10.9	4	2.3	11.1
	51.5	10.3	14.1	10.5	3.3	2.4	9.6
Dendermonde	40.8	15.8	9.5	13.3	5.1	3.5	12
	40.2	14.8	11.2	11.7	4.6	3.1	14.2
Eeklo	18	39.6	16.7	13.2	5.7	3.2	3.6
	17.9	35.2	21.4	15.1	4.8	2.7	2.8
Gent I	36.6	18.1	21.5	10.1	3.8	3.6	5.2
	38.6	19.8	20	9.5	4.1	2.9	3.9
Gent II	42.3	22.2	11	10.6	3.8	3	6.9
	41.3	22.7	10.2	12	4.2	3.2	6.3
Oudenaarde	25.2	13.9	37.4	11.7	3.7	3	5.1
	29	18.2	25.2	10.6	4.6	3.4	9.2
Sint-Niklaas	32	25.9	8.5	17.1	4.2	4.1	8.3
	35.7	27	7.5	13.5	4.6	3.9	7.9

Notes: Table 2.a shows two rates for each district. The first row of percentages is the average calculated for the birth places of the deaf research population; the second row is the average for the district as a whole based on the numbers by Jaspers and Stevens (Jaspers & Stevens (1985) *Arbeid en tewerkstelling in Oost-Vlaanderen*, 97.)

**Table A.2** Occupational structure of the East Flemish provincial towns & Ghent, in %

City	Agriculture	Unsk. labour	Textile	Crafts	Trade & Transp.	Adm. & prof.	Not prod.
Aalst	48.5	10.1	12.5	10.9	4	2.3	11.1
Ninove	36.6	18.1	21.5	10.1	3.8	3.6	5.2
Geraardsbergen	18	39.6	16.7	13.2	5.7	3.2	3.6
District Aalst	34.4	22.6	16.9	11.4	4.5	3	6.6
Deinze	51.5	10.3	14.1	10.5	3.3	2.4	9.6
Gent	25.2	13.9	37.4	11.7	3.7	3.0	5.1
Dendermonde	40.8	15.8	9.5	13.3	5.1	3.5	12
Eeklo	40.2	14.8	11.2	11.7	4.6	3.1	14.2
Sint-Niklaas	41.3	22.7	10.2	12	4.2	3.2	6.3
Lokeren	17.9	35.2	21.4	15.1	4.8	2.7	2.8
District Sint-Niklaas	29.6	29	15.8	13.6	4.5	3	4.6
Ronse	42.3	22.2	11	10.6	3.8	3	6.9
Oudenaarde	38.6	19.8	20	9.5	4.1	2.9	3.9
District Oudenaarde	40.5	21	15.5	10.1	4	3	5.4

Source: Jaspers & Stevens (1985) *Arbeid en tewerkstelling in Oost-Vlaanderen*, 97.

**Table A.3** Overview deaf population (relative to the total population), Belgium 1858

	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Ratio</b>
East Flanders					
<i>Living at home</i>	135	79	214		
<i>Institutionalized</i>	77	67	144	786884	0,054%
Antwerp					
<i>Living at home</i>	46	35	81		
<i>Institutionalized</i>	35	10	45	445662	0,028%
Brabant					
<i>Living at home</i>	142	99	241		
<i>Institutionalized</i>	40	69	109	772800	0,045%
West Flanders					
<i>Living at home</i>	95	80	175		
<i>Institutionalized</i>	52	50	102	634607	0,044%
Limburg					
<i>Living at home</i>	51	26	77		
<i>Institutionalized</i>	16	9	25	193188	0,053%
<b>Flanders</b>					
<i>Living at home</i>	469	319	788		
<i>Institutionalized</i>	220	205	425	2833141	0,043%
<b>Wallonia</b>					
<i>Living at home</i>	387	293	680		
<i>Institutionalized</i>	58	38	96	1789295	0,043%
<b>Total Belgium</b>					
<i>Living at home</i>	856	612	1468		
<i>Institutionalized</i>	278	243	521	4622436	0,043%

Source: *Exposé de la situation du Royaume (1851-1860)*



## Chapter 4

**Table A.4** Mean and median age at first registration of unemployment according to level of industrialization, in years

	Industrial				Semi-industrial				Not industrial			
	M		W		M		W		M		W	
	M	Md	M	Md	M	Md	M	Md	M	Md	M	Md
Deaf	27.8	23.2	40.4	44.8	61	61	35.5	30.1	33.5	21.7	40.2	38.7
Sibling	61.6	61.6	34.9	32.3	-	-	34.2	31.9	31.6	17.8	33.7	31.8

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Notes: N=20 deaf men, N=24 deaf women, N=5 brothers, N=26 sisters

**Table A.5** Employment according to level of industrialization, birth cohort 2, in %

	Industrial				Semi-industrial				Not industrial			
	Deaf		Siblings		Deaf		Siblings		Deaf		Siblings	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
Agriculture	10	0	2	0	20	0	11	21	15	12	19	30
Unskilled labour	10	0	21	30	20	20	33	29	20	8	39	23
Crafts	80	84	50	42	20	80	33	21	40	60	15	27
Textile	15	7	16	21	0	40	22	14	5	12	5	22
Construction	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
Food	0	0	5	3	20	0	11	0	0	0	5	0
Clothing	35	77	5	18	0	40	0	7	35	48	2	5
Other	30	0	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0
Trade & transport	0	0	7	15	0	0	11	14	2	0	14	8
Service sector	0	8	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	0
Domestic service	0	8	0	9	20	0	11	14	23	16	7	13
Undetermined	0	0	0	3	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

Notes: N= 108 deaf occupations; N=199 hearing occupations

## Chapter 5

**Table A.6** Cox regression of the probability to marry, sibling cohorts

	Model 1 Siblings (<30)			Model 2 Siblings (>30)		
	Hazard ratio	p-value	Distribu- tion (%)	Hazard ratio	p-value	Distribu- tion (%)
<i>Birth cohort</i>		0.464			0.379	
Cohort 1 (ref)	1	-	41.9	1	-	41.2
Cohort 2	0.846	0.444	58.1	0.900	0.904	58.8
<i>Gender</i>		0.288			0.149	
Male (ref.)	1	-	53.4	1	-	51.5
Female	1.243	0.271	46.6	1.514	0.181	48.5
<i>Residence</i>		0.030			0.509	
Urban stayer (ref.)	1	-	20.9	1	-	16.5
Rural stayer	0.727	0.226	55.6	1.198	0.719	60.8
Migrant	<b>0.540</b>	0.050	23.5	0.619	0.410	22.7
<i>SES</i>		0.000			0.842	
Unskilled (ref.)	1	-	16.2	1	-	8.2
(Semi-)skilled	<b>0.618</b>	0.084	36.4	0.835	0.770	31
Middle Class	<b>0.329</b>	0.000	47.4	0.777	0.650	60.8
<i>Parity</i>		0.156			0.424	
Firstborn (ref.)	1	-	13.7	1	-	12.4
Second and third born	1.172	0.613	37.6	<b>3.234</b>	0.064	39.1
Higher	1.460	0.211	48.7	2.511	0.144	48.5
	N individuals: 234 N marriages: 106 Time at risk: 2722.150 Log likelihood: -523.5081 Prob > chi2: 0.0026			N individuals: 97 N marriages: 48 Time at risk: 1670.800 Log likelihood: -198.4594 Prob > chi2: 0.5670		

## Chapter 6

**Table A.7** Household cycle of siblings with a complete household history according to district, in %

	Aalst	Dendermonde	Eeklo	Ghent	Oude-naarde	Sint-Niklaas
N=	19	20	4	69	20	14
<b>Living with parents until death</b>	75	70	100	37.5	42.9	90
<b>Living with parents until their death</b>	25	20	0	59.4	28.6	10
Living in with sibling	0	0	0	10.5	0	0
Living together with siblings	50	100	0	57.9	50	100
Living in/together with relatives	0	0	0	5.3	0	0
Living in/together with non-kin	0	0	0	10.5	0	0
Living alone	50	0	0	15.8	0	0
Institutionalized	0	0	0	0	50	0
%	100	100	0	100	100	100
<b>Other household trajectory</b>	0	10	0	3.1	28.6	0
Living in/together with siblings	0	0	0	0	50	0
Living in/together with relatives	0	0	0	0	0	0
Living in/together with non-kin	0	0	0	100	0	0
Living alone	0	100	0	0	0	0
Institutionalized	0	0	0	0	50	0
Combination	0	0	0	0	0	0
%	0	100	0	100	100	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: MS Access database, research individual file

