Between the past and the present. Government interventions and children in residential care: A never ending contested space? The case of the orphanages of the city of Ghent.

Lieselot De Wilde

Promotor: Prof. Dr. B. Vanobbergen

Proefschrift ingediend tot het behalen van de academische graad van
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First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.

Martin Niemöller

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When I hesitatingly started this doctoral dissertation about 6 years ago, I was determined to finish it. I had no idea how I would bring this dissertation to a favourable conclusion but I realised immediately I wouldn't be able to do it alone. On the contrary, during these research years, which just flew by, a lot of people crossed my path.

Even though it is said to 'save the best for last', in this case I do not agree. I would like to start these words of gratitude by thanking my supervisor Bruno Vanobbergen. Bruno, I think you realise by now that this dissertation would never have turned out this way without your support. Not only is your enthusiasm and passion for this field of research communicable, but you also guided me while walking a tightrope in the balance between trust and supervision. During this whole process, which already started during the years before I even considered writing a PhD - when I did a Masters thesis under your supervision -, you have been my *maître à penser*.

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This research would not have been possible without the excellent cooperation with the archive of the Public Centre for Social Welfare of Ghent and in particular, I would like to thank Tom Haeck, Nele Lefever and all the other members of staff. They did not only provide an wealth of information in the form of the well-preserved records of the Ghent orphanages, but they were also a great partner in creating the exhibition and the book.

My friends. They say good friends are hard to find, well I can definitely say I have found some precious ones over the years, who had enough with one word to know if I needed peace and quiet or if I was in despaired need of distraction and amusement.

Special thanks to my family. My father, mother and brothers made my life in many ways easier throughout this process.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Children at risk

The starting point of this dissertation lies in the growing academic interest for the so-called 'children at risk'. This concept has recently been extensively discussed in international literature (Bakker, Braster, Rietveld-Van Wingerden & Van Gorp, 2007; Dekker, 2001; 2007; 2009; Grosvenor, 2009; Kalb, 2013; Komen, 1999; Lohmann & Mayer, 2009; Mayer, Lohmann & Grosvenor, 2009; Vanobbergen, 2009). The child at risk concept has many faces. However, a running thread throughout the international research is the attention for how during the 19th and the 20th century, groups of children have been constructed as 'children in danger' or as 'dangerous children'. The idea of the child at risk is strongly related to constructions of 'families at risk', families that were for many reasons described as unsafe and problematic environments for children.

Research in Belgian and the Netherlands recently focussed on the history of children at risk. In 2007 the Belgian-Dutch Society for the History of Education, for example, dedicated its annual publication to the history of educational care for youth at risk (Bakker, Braster, Rietveld-Van Wingerden & Van Gorp, 2007). This book aims to illustrate the present-day panic towards children and youth in terms of risk against a historical background. In different chapters studies are presented on various groups of endangered children and associated remedies in Europe throughout the past centuries. Attention is paid to city children in poor health, by researching children's colonies and outdoor schools. But also children with a learning disability, a psychiatric disorder or children who are mentally challenged and often end up in some kind of peadological institution have been objects of the historical gaze. In 2009 another important work on this subject was published. The book 'Children and Youth at Risk, Historical and International Perspectives' edited by Mayer, Lohmann and Grosvenor (2009) provides valuable insights in *"the historical development, shaping, and construction of risk elements in childhood and youth as well as in their pedagogical implications and effects"*. The work shows how in the past years the child at risk has been studied all over the world, from different European countries (the UK, Germany, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Portugal and Greece), up to research in Nigeria, Mexico and India. The various research subjects cover topics such as boarding schools, abandoned children and orphan houses over charity schools and education for deaf or female youth to health and welfare care.

That same year 'Paedagogica Historica, International Journal of the History of Education' dedicated a special issue on 'children and youth a risk', focussing on the social and historical contexts in which the concept of children at risk arose. During the

19th and 20th century very specific and ever-changing interventions were designed for various categories of at risk children. As clearly stated in the introduction of the special issue: "*circumstances which one society would not even perceive as dangerous may be viewed as a significant threat in another*" (Lohmann & Mayer, 2009, p. 1). 'At risk' can consequently be interpreted in many ways, ranging from alleged behavioural problems of children and young people and the families they come from, to children and young people with certain physical or mental disabilities. Jeroen J.H. Dekker, professor of History and Theory of Education at the University of Groningen, states in his contribution that when "*looking at children at risk in history, one of the most striking changes over time is the relative and absolute growth of the number of at-risk children*" (2009, p. 17). Dekker illustrates how the on-going creation of new children at risk resulted in the creation of new measures to put as much as possible an end to (new) risks. However, despite the widely praised improved standard of living and the numerous initiatives, the group of children at risk has not diminished. On the contrary, it seems there have never been more at risk categories than today. Dekker concludes that what was once promisingly announced as 'the Century of the Child' (referring to the well-known book by Ellen Key) in essence turned out to be 'the century of the child at risk'.

All the international literature seems to agree with the conclusion that "*threats to children and youth do not simply constitute an ahistorical constant, but take on different shapes under different social conditions*" (Lohmann & Mayer, 2009, p. 1). Therefore, researching a specific geographic and cultural environment can provide insights in what is perceived, discussed, described and investigated as a risk at a given moment in time and space (Mayer, Lohmann & Grosvenor, 2009). In this doctoral dissertation, where we meet this theorem, the focus is on the residential care for orphaned children in the city of Ghent (Flanders – Belgium) between the end of the Second World War and the closing of the last orphanage in 1984.

1.1.2 Orphanages and orphaned children

Over the past few decades, a lot of international research focused on government interventions of a residential nature for children at risk (Dekker, 1985; Head-König, 2010; Jacobi, 2009). During the 19th and 20th century a diversity of residential interventions were designed in order to tackle a variety of categories 'at risk' children. For instance, boarding schools, charity schools, alms-houses, vacation colonies, observation centres, and many more. These (government) initiatives are mainly based on the idea of limiting the (future) risks for both the child and society. Orphanages and orphaned children are a textbook case of such a government intervention and have therefore been more than once the subject of historical (educational) research (Coldrey, 2000; Colacço, 2009; Groenveld, Dekker & Willemse, 1997; Hacsi, 1997; Jacobi, 2009; Murdoch, 2006; Søland, 2015). Groenveld, Dekker and Willemse (1997) described in a voluminous work six centuries of care in orphanages and children's

homes in the Netherlands. In relation to these orphanages, Coldrey (2000) reveals an important field of tension in meaning referring to the orphanage as a second chance and a refuge for some children while simultaneous being a place of terror and degradation for other children. At the same time, Jacobi (2009) puts another big question to the fore asking policy makers and professionals while discussing residential care for children: do foster parents or orphanages provide the most supportive educational environment?

Furthermore, an interesting point in some of the contemporary research regarding orphanages is related to their population. Research has shown that very few of the children living in an orphanage during the second half of the 20th century were 'true' or 'real' orphans (Connolly, 2008; Groenveld, Dekker & Willemse, 1997; Hacsi, 1997; Raftery & 0' Sullivan, 1999; Vehkalahti, 2009). This raises the question why children after the Second World War in fact ended up in an orphanage. According to Murdoch a lot has to do with what she calls 'making parents invisible' in apparent risky situations. "*The best way to prove that the children in question were indeed in need of rescue was to establish that the parents or guardians were either absent or abusive*" (Murdoch, 2006, p. 17). A well-known and widely used example is the Barnardo studio in London where photos were taken of alleged abandoned and neglected children (see for example: Bressey, 2002; Fink, 2008). One would create the image of the desolate child. Therefore, the children received a scruffy look by tearing their clothes apart. It was "*implied that poor children were nomadic, alone in the world without homes or families*" (Murdoch, 2006, p 25). Most of the children never been abandoned or neglected, but the image of 'the homeless child' was important for the legitimisation of (government) intervention. The parents of the children, and especially the unmarried mothers, often turned themselves to residential care to seek help and support for the children and themselves (Jacobi, 2009; Murdoch, 2006). Murdoch (2006) introduces the term 'philanthropic kidnapping', referring to society's tendency to separate these purported 'nobody's' children from their parents.
In light of these insights, this doctoral dissertation takes a close look at the case of the Ghent orphanages after the Second World War. In the following parts of this introduction we will first address the history of the Ghent orphan houses, analyse how the orphaned child is seen as a child at risk and elaborate on the various research questions of this dissertation. Secondly, the different methodological pathways are presented and explored. At the end of this introduction a brief outline of the content of the different chapters is given.

1.2 Towards a scientific study of the Ghent orphanages

1.2.1 History of the Ghent orphanages

During the past decades considerable attention has been paid to the rich history of the Ghent orphanages and its residents. Despite their long histories only little academic research has been done up until today. What we do know about these institutions mostly stems from popular literature. Marcel De Bleecker, a former orphan himself, wrote the best-known book about the orphanages in Ghent in 1990. De Bleecker titled the book 'Verweesd, verwezen, de geschiedenis van de kulders te Gent' ('To be orphaned, the history of the Kulders of Ghent'). In 2010, a revised version of the work was issued, entitled: 'kuldersbloed en Blauwemeisjestranen. Gentse weeshuizen 1615-1984' ('Kuldersblood and Bluegirlstears. The Ghent orphanages 1615-1984'). In 1985 Prosper De Smet, a notorious Ghent author wrote, 'Oproer in het weeshuis' ('Riot in the orphanage'), a novel about the fire that struck the boys' orphanage in 1947. And more recently there was the youth novel of Lies Bate, 'Nestvallers' (2008) ('Nest flyers'), about the life of the Ghent orphan boys and girls in the 30s of the 20th century, in which the well-known fanfare of the kulders was given a prominent place.

Even though the attention for the history of these institutions is not new, a thorough scientific study of the Ghent orphanages was still missing. Besides some master theses at Ghent University concerning the history of the Ghent orphanages (Cooremans, 1985; De Greve & Van Eetvelt, 1980; De Keyser, 1985; Vael, 1989), no study has been done on the last episode of this centuries long history. With this dissertation, we want to fill this gap. Therefore, the focus of our research of the Ghent orphan houses and their inhabitants is on the post-war period of the 20th century. Our study starts after the Second World War, in 1945 and ends in 1984, the year the last orphan house of the city of Ghent closed its doors. In 1945 two orphanages of the city of Ghent were still up and running, one for the boys in the 'Martelaarslaan' and one for the girls in the 'Rodelijvekensstraat'. After years of discussion about whether or not a new home needed to be built, both the orphan girls and boys moved in 1962 to a brand new institution 'Prince Filip'. For the first time in their age-long existence the orphan boys and girls lived together under one roof, although both groups stayed in their own quarters of the new institution.

The history of the orphan houses in Ghent dates back from the 7th century. In that time some sort of orphan care was provided by various religious organisations in the city of Ghent, financed by mild gifts of wealthy citizens. Centuries later, in the 13th century the city of Ghent started to organise some residential care for orphaned

children, primarily as part of pre-existing institutions (for adults) (De Bleecker, 2010). In 1531 Charles the Fifth[1] gave the order to establish public institutions that should be responsible for the support and assistance of the needy. However, the care for the poor and the sick remained for the most part in the realm of charity as funding still depended on gifts, bequests and other donations. Notwithstanding a process of laicisation, we can state that up until the French Revolution (1789) poor relief was predominantly in the hands of charitable religious work (Vermaerke, 1995). After the French Revolution this changed as poor relief became a duty and a responsibility of society.

This shift called for a reorganisation of all forms of help, support and care. Consequently, the public charity evolved in 1797 to the creation of two important institutions (Verschaeren, 2001). On the one hand there was the 'Bureel van weldadigheid' ('Bureau of beneficence') that was responsible for people in need who lived at home. On the other hand a 'Commissie der Burgerlijke Godshuizen' ('Committee of Public Alms-houses') was installed. These committees took care of the goods of the poor and the admittance of destitute people in the hospitals and alms-houses. They functioned under the supervision of the city's Mayor and the Board of Aldermen (Vermaerke, 1995). A few years later the Law of 15 Pluviôse of the year XIII[2] stated that the orphaned children were put under the tutelage of the 'Commissie der Burgelijke Godshuizen' ('Committee of Public Alms-houses'). This guardianship entailed the right to supervise next to the duty to take care of the education and the upkeep of the orphaned children (Verschaeren, 2001). The civil revolution and the ensuing declaration of independence of the Kingdom of Belgium (1830) did not alter this organisational structure. With the Act of 10 March 1925 the division between the 'commissie der Burgerlijke Godshuizen' ('Committee of Public Alms-houses') and the 'weldadigheidsburelen' ('Bureaus of Beneficence') disappeared. The 'Commissie van Openbare Onderstand' ('Committees on Public Poverty Relief' or 'Bureau of Social Welfare') replaced both institutions (Vermaerke, 1995)[3].

The roots of the orphan houses of our study are to be found in the 19th century. These orphanages fell under the jurisdiction of the 'Commissie der Burgerlijk Godshuizen' ('Committee of Public Alms-houses'). The care for orphaned children was no longer settled in the realm of the private but became a public, governmental responsibility. In 1873 a stately and grand institution was built by the city of Ghent to house all orphan boys. This orphanage was and is better known as 'kulderhome' or

1 Keizer Karel V (Ghent, February 24, 1500 – Cuacos de Yuste (Spain), September 21, 1558)
2 According to the French Republican Calendar. In the Christian era this is February 3, 1805
3 Decennia later these Committees on Public Poverty Relief or the Bureau of Social Welfare (de Commissies van Openbare Onderstand) would be replaced by the law of 1976 on the Public Centres for Social Welfare (Openbare Centra voor Maatschappelijk welzijn).

'kulderschool'. 'Kulders' is the name the orphan boys in Ghent were given by the people, a name which they carried their whole lives and referred to their dress code. In those days they had to wear a typical type of garment called a 'kolder', which was a type of dress-like piece in a nude colour covering the breast and back and assembled at their necks. Above this 'kolder', they wore a blue sleeveless robe. Specific care was not just provided for the boys. The orphaned girls of Ghent likewise found shelter during several centuries in various Ghent orphanages. All of the girls finally moved to a modest institution in the 'Rodelijvekensstraat' in 1864. The street name, which still exists today, is derived from the traditional and distinctive uniform of the girls that consisted of a long blue skirt and a red top. Today, both buildings are almost completely demolished. The last Ghent orphanage home 'Prince Filip', however is still fully intact. The closure of this institution in 1984 marked the end of a long and rich history of residential care for orphans organised by the city of Ghent.

1.2.2 The orphaned child as the 'child as risk'

As mentioned in the introduction, our study of the Ghent orphanages is situated in the international research tradition on children at risk. Most authors situate the origins of 'the child at risk' as a conception of childhood at the beginning of the 19th century, even though the term 'children at risk' was used for the first time in the USA at the beginning of the 20th century (Jacobi, 2009). At that time, numerous initiatives across the USA were developed to save society from 'the morally endangered child' or 'gangs of unsupervised children' (Connelly, 2008). Children at risk were pre-eminently children who were exposed to misery, desolation and neglect (Jacobi, 2009). They were labelled as abandoned, foundlings, vagrants and orphans. On the one hand we consider these children as being at risk, in which the child is perceived as threatened. On the other hand we see these children to pose a risk, in which the child is perceived as a threat. In Belgium, for example, 'l'enfant moralement abandonné' ('the morally neglected child') and 'l'enfant martyr' ('the little martyr') were by the end of the 19th century generally used concepts. This new terminology reflects a major shift, in which children were not merely seen as potential delinquents, but as children in danger as well. The increased attention for these children at risk was concentrated in three separate areas, all interconnected en interrelated through different networks: (1) philanthropic societies (2) the judicial and penal institutions and (3) the medical world (which manifested slightly later than the first two).

This attention towards the 'child at risk' is historically strongly connected to the attention for the '(ab)normal child' (Lohmann & Mayer, 2009). The fascination with the '(ab)normal' is not new. A landmark was the construction of the normal curve by Carl Friedrich Gauss in 1795. This made it possible to compare everyone to 'the average'. However, there was not only the attraction of the middle. There was also great interest in everything and everyone who deviated from the average and labelled as 'abnormal'. This interest was embedded in an atmosphere of fear, not so much for

the ‘abnormal person’, but for the impact of abnormality on the good order of society. After all, a healthy society requires healthy members. In the course of the 20th century children (and their growth and development) were increasingly visualised on the basis of diagrams, tables and graphs (Turmel, 2008). This also meant a strong increase of all kinds of tests and other measuring instruments to distinguish the ‘normal’ children from the ‘abnormal’ children. In Belgium, for instance, Ovide Decroly e.g. played a crucial role in this process (Van Gorp, 2005). This trend found its way to the Ghent orphanages as well. Before the children were admitted in the orphanage, they had to take a medical and psychological test to see whether or not they were healthy and 'normal'. Children who did not passed these tests were considered as ‘abnormal’ and did not belong in the Ghent orphanages.

Children who fluctuated between being at risk and becoming a risk were the subject of intervention. They had to be protected from society and society had to be protected from them. By the end of the 19th century there was a growing consensus that the education (and thus protection) of children could no longer be seen as a responsibility of the parents only. More and more the government was regarded as a necessary co-educator. A clear illustration of a government intervention based on this idea, are the orphan houses of the city of Ghent, which unmistakably embodied the spirit of that age.

1.2.3 The Ghent orphanages: a past and present government intervention

The tension between the educational responsibility of the parents and the educational responsibility of the government opens a space to define the concept of children at risk in this study. It concerns those children whose parents forsake the so-called ‘inevitability of education’ to the extent that the government sets itself responsible to intervene.

The first part of this research sheds light on the history of the Ghent orphan houses, organised by the Bureau of Social Welfare. In general the ultimate goal of our research aimed to get insights in the dynamics, policies and daily operation of the Ghent orphanages. We focused on gathering insights into the daily lives of the children during their stay in a Ghent orphanage, with an initial goal to contextualise these government institutions in time and space. In particular, we first paid close attention to the admittance policy, by putting forward the question of who ended up in the Ghent orphan houses (1945 - 1984). Second, we focused on the interpretation of the notion of the orphaned child by examining if and how we could consider the ‘orphan child’ as a ‘child at risk’. Third, we shift our gaze towards the role and the functions of these institutions within the broader (future) community of the city of Ghent. Fourth, we bowed down to analyse the educational (reform) ambitions of the Bureau of Social Welfare. We do not intend to tell *the history* of the Ghent

orphanages, but want to do justice to a history of childhood that in the past too often has been neglected.

In the second part of this doctoral dissertation an explicit connection is made between the past and the present. Our retrospective narratives of childhood from the oral history part of this research were of critical relevance in this process. We considered them as narratives of meaning constructed between past experiences and recollections in the current context and not as stories that represent an objective past. The former orphans and former members of staff evaluated their past based on their current situation or situate their memories within a contemporary framework and current events. In any case it rapidly became clear that their time at the orphanage is still very 'present' in their daily lives. The different contents that have led to the construction of the second part of this study know their origins in the registration and analysis of our oral history material. We were repeatedly confronted with new research routes, initiated by our participants. In other words, we, from a research point of view, got more than what we asked for. We reconstructed stories into histories by connecting individual narratives with a broader social and political context. Or in the words of Abrams to link "*the personal experience to the public, the past to the present*" (Abrams, 2010, p. 16). The second part of our research project covers four chapters, each attempting to address various calls of our participants. We translated and divided these appeals into three 'quests'. First, a presence of the past is researched within a quest for recognition. As we will show, the former orphans do regard themselves as victims or as survivors of a regime by a questionable institution. They are strongly convinced that this demands some kind of recognition. Second, the quest for social justice is examined within the context of the politics of apology. This question dealt with the role of the state/the government when being confronted with a plea for more recognition. Third, the former orphans feel like they missed and still miss a personal history. We analysed this quest for a personal history by exploring the different meanings of the personal file.
Finally, the last chapter of this dissertation focuses on the methodological and analytical complexity of doing (oral history) research with former residents of orphanages. It touches many ethical issues. Looking back on the process of data collection and the research process it became clear that the experience in itself raised considerable dilemmas and issues with an ethical dimension.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	CHAPTER
Who were the children ending up in the Ghent orphan houses?	2
Is it possible to consider the 'orphan child' as a 'child at risk'?	2
What was the role and the function of the Ghent orphanages within the broader community of the city of Ghent?	2
(How) Did the (educational) ambitions of the Bureau of Social welfare influence the elementary pedagogical mission of the Ghent orphanages?	3
A quest for recognition - a presence of the past?	4
A quest for social justice - a politic of apology?	5
A quest for personal history – the personal file?	6
A quest for methodological reflection – research ethics?	7

Table 1. Research questions

In order to research these questions we implemented two research methods to study the last chapter of the history of the orphanages of the city of Ghent.

1.2.4 Methodology

The realisation of this study was a circular process in which both an archival and an oral history research component are the pillars of data collection. Both research methods are interrelated and executed in the context of the case-study of the urban Ghent orphanages (1945 – 1984).

1.2.4.1 The case of the Ghent orphanages

To study the concept of the child at risk we choose a particular educational setting, the orphanages of the city of Ghent (1945-1984). The method of case-study takes into account the social and historical context which is crucial in every educational historical research (Gibbert, Ruigrok & Wicki, 2008). The choice for a case-study research enabled us to analyse the concept of children at risk (e.g. orphaned children) in depth, as chapter 2 will show. Furthermore, the choice to research one particular case allowed a dialogue between the past and present as shown in the second part of this dissertation.

The reason we have chosen to study this phenomenon in the city of Ghent is threefold. First, there was already a good contact with the archive of the Public Centre for Social Welfare. Second, because a case-study opens the opportunity to research a

context about which knowledge is limited (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). This is definitely the case with the Ghent orphanages since these institutions (in this time period) have been neglected for a long time as field of study. Third, because all remaining archival material of the orphanages organised by the city of Ghent have been stored in the archive for decades up until now. As our main research goal entailed the (re)construction of the last part of the history of the Ghent orphanages we choose to combine two qualitative research methods. These research methods enabled us to connect the past to the present. As Abrams (2010, p. 8) asserts in the Oral History Theory: "*the use of oral history can uncover new evidence, but it also exemplifies the ways in which sensitive analysis of personal testimony can lead to a deeper and richer understanding of how the past is remembered, reworked and reconstructed by people in the present*". (Abrams, 2010, p. 8)

1.2.4.2 Methods of data collection and data analysis

1.2.4.2.1 Archival research

The archival documents of the Bureau of Social Welfare of Ghent were an important source for our study of the history of the Ghent orphanages. We relied on the so-called 'contemporary archive' of the archive of the Public Centre for Social Welfare of the city of Ghent. This contains the historical material of all three urban orphan houses in the period 1945-1984. The research in the records consisted of an analysis of all available written sources and visual materials (photographs and video recordings). In particular, we analysed a large part of the personal files of the admitted children: 214 personal files of the boys and 126 of the girls. In addition, all personal files from our participants of the oral history research were studied next to the supplementary so-called family dossiers if available.

Besides the personal files and the family dossiers, the annual reports (1945-1984), the digital version of the enrolment registers (1945-1984) and numerous general policy documents were analysed. For example, the correspondence between de principals of the orphanages and the Bureau of Social Welfare and later on, Public Centre for Social Welfare (Openbare Centra voor Maatschappelijk welzijn). But also the correspondence with the juvenile court, the guardians, the parents and the school contained interesting information. Last but not least, there were the logbooks and agendas of the staff members, texts concerning educational issues and restrictions, communications about the construction of home Prince Filip and regulations of internal order.

By examining the historical records it was possible to investigate the history of the Ghent orphanages with the intention to analyse and contextualise the histories of the Ghent orphan houses as it 'used to be'. In this vein, we do not abandon the idea of post structural archival research entirely (Gidley, 2004). We consider it possible to

establish ‘facts’ and ‘knowledge’ about the past through archival research, as will be argued in chapter 5. However, it is not that simple. Even though the world of 'the archive' appeals to the imagination, as it seems that ‘the past’ is waiting for a researcher to finally discover it (Tesar, 2015). We do not consider these historical documents as neutral representatives of the past, as will be illustrated in chapter 6 for the case of the personal file of the former orphaned children. “*Archival institutions need to decide on what they will archive, display and allow researchers to see, and how this will be done. They therefore cannot be considered to be neutral*” (Tesar, 2015, p. 102). Consequently, we opt to confront our findings of the archive with data retrieved from a variety of research sources.

Finally, it is important to stipulate that the archive was consulted only after the approval of the Commission for the Protection of Privacy. It was necessary to process all information anonymously due to the fact that all data retrieved from the archival documents date back from less than 100 years ago. Upon approval of the application with the commission it should be assured “*that personal data are handled with care and thoroughly protected and that your future privacy also remains guaranteed*” (http://www.privacycommission.be).

1.2.4.2.2 Oral history

"Oh, where do I actually start?" or *"Does this has to go fast?"* were often heard quotations when we started the interview. This part of our research is based on the stories, testimonies, and (childhood) narratives of people who as a child or a member of staff have inhaled 'life as it was in the Ghent orphanage’. In the period 2010 to 2012 these testimonies were assembled. The interviews were intense. For some of the respondents it was the first time many fragments and anecdotes of their childhood were moulded into one story. Others had already told their life story over and over again. From the beginning there was a great interest in our research and it has grown ever since. At first we sought out possible candidates to tell about their time in the Ghent orphanages through local media and over the Internet by posting announcements. Fairly soon, the news spread and the potential respondents spontaneously presented themselves.

We performed 45 interviews, 40 with former orphaned boys and girls and 5 with male and female ex-staff members. Our choice for the oral history method is not surprising as it is typically implemented to research past experiences and perspectives of groups of people ‘hidden from history’ (Perks & Thomson, 1998). Children and orphaned children in particular have long remained underexposed in historiography. Historians of childhood have only recently taken interest in this form of research (Fass, 2010). However since “*oral history is as old as history itself*” (Thompson, 2000, p. 25) we pay a considerable amount of attention to the history of the oral history method in Chapter 7. The oral history method is to be situated in a larger tradition of research

based on oral sources. Brenheim distinguishes two chief types of oral history research: "*the first-hand narratives, eyewitness reports and second-hand narratives or hearsay reports of events which must be considered as legends*" (Brenheim in Vansina, 2006, p. 3). Our research is to be situated in the former category of oral history research. We aimed to historically reconstruct this educational site (e.g. the Ghent orphanages), in line with Perks & Thomson (1998) definition of oral history *"by interviewing eye-witnesses or participants of a particular 'event' in the past"*. So, as Abrams concludes: *"'the reconstructive agenda' of oral history research still remains a prime motivation and legitimate one at the for many oral history research projects today"* (2010, p. 5).

The semi-structured in-depth interviews mainly took place at the home of our participants. Some interviews were held at the University department or at a local pub. They lasted approximately 2 to 3 hours. Essentially all interviews started with the same open question: "can you tell your story about the Ghent orphanages?". All the other questions presented to the participants were thematically prepared and organised as illustrated below.

INTERVIEW FORMER ORPHANED CHILDREN OF THE CITY OF GHENT	
DAILY RITUALS – structure – tasks – punishments – friendships	**GENDERASPECT** – contact – 'treatment' – brothers/sisters
SCHOOL – place – importance – profession – city children	**LEISURE ACTIVITIES** – after school – weekends – vacations
PROFILATION – materialities of schooling – orphanage as a space (senses) – 'possibilities'	**FAMILIAL CIRCUMSTANCES** – before – during – after their stay in the orphanage
CONTACT WITH – the 'outside world' – other children – staff	**DEPARTURE/DISCHARGE** – reasons – preparation – work/school
REFLECTION – review – memories – reunions	**ADMISSION** – cause – first days – first impression, memories, …

INTERVIEW STAFF MEMBERS ORPHANAGES OF THE CITY OF GHENT	
PROFESSIONALISATION – education – training – selfstudy	**FIRST DAYS** – presuppositions – experience, impressions
BACKGROUND – career – admission children – own children	**POLICY** – institutional views – own perspective - changes – Bureau of Social Welfare
REFLECTION – review – new insights – perspective of the children	**CONTACT WITH** – the children – colleagues – principal – parents
THE AVERAGE WORKDAY	

Table 2. Research themes

The narratives of the participants determined the definitive order and content of the questions. Before the interview began an informed consent was drawn up in two copies. This included among other things that the oral testimony would be processed anonymously, not shared with a third-party and afterwards conserved in the archives of the Public Centre for Social Welfare of Ghent.

From stories to histories

Bleyen aptly suggests, "*the interview is first an act of 'narration', then becomes a 'narrative' or text, and finally receives a place in a historical account or 'history'*" (Bleyen, 2008, p. 346). The participants gave us more than 'just' answers to our questions and in consequence we 'did more' with their narratives than merely taking over the recorded text. We elaborated their stories into histories. This means that oral history research should be understood as a double process: "*It refers to the process of conducting and recording interviews with people in order to elicit information from them about the past. But an oral history is also the product of the interview, the narrative account of past events. It is both the act of recording and the record that is produced*" (Abrams, 2010, p. 2). In this study, as for instance shown in chapter 4 & 7, we want to emphasise the reciprocity of the relationship between the researcher and the respondent within the context of oral history as we jointly constructed the research source.

In this regard, we want to point out that the 'doing', 'analysing' and 'interpreting' phases of this research were strongly intertwined (Abrams, 2010). In chapter 7 of this

dissertation we elaborate on the issue of interpretation and representation of research results. The interest in and registration of the individual stories of orphans in this study does not mean that the combination of these stories gave us the history of the Ghent orphanages. However, as we did not only study the orphanage 'from the outside', but also from 'the inside' by capturing the childhood narratives of former orphaned children we were able to replete the 'official story' with their interpretation of the past.

1.2.4.2.3 A multiplicity of voices, a variety of perspectives

It is ultimately this variety of testimonies and the multitude of memories in combination with the extensive research in the records that resulted in this doctoral dissertation. Of all studied archival documents, notes were taken or photocopies were made. All data was put on computer and stored by archive section. The archival documents were gradually studied during the past years. We started with the registration records, general correspondence and policy documents such as annual reports. Next, the personal files and the archive of the Secretary were examined. The interviews were recorded in full and transcribed verbatim. A serial number was attributed to the file of each interview, complemented with the name of the interviewee, gender, location, date and duration of the interview. On the right side of the sheet a column provided space for the analysis. For the data analysis of this study no computer software was implemented. All interviews were re-read to highlight eye-catching fragments or key phrases that illustrate the themes we put forward for analysis, based on the international literature.

In order to address the research question of chapter 4, the quest for recognition, we have chosen two extra research sources to explore. Both sites are organised and maintained by the former orphans themselves. We studied one of the largest Facebook groups of the former orphaned children, entitled: 'Blue girls and Kulders' and the Former orphan league, called the 'Royal association of the former orphans of Ghent'. Our data collection contains a registration of the activities within these two groups. A qualitative content data analysis was applied to identify the ways in which the former orphans organise and express themselves in and with reference to these two sites (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This analysis allowed us to identify important common themes and patterns throughout the narratives. It turned out to be highly relevant to confront all of our research sources with each other. The multiplicity of perspectives allowed us to shed different lights on the history of the orphanages.

1.3 Content

The dissertation consists of eight chapters. After this introduction, six chapters follow in which the research questions as discussed above are addressed in each of them.

We determine this dissertation with a general conclusion. To end this introduction, we elucidate the contents of each of the following chapters of this dissertation.

1.3.1 Chapter 2

Between a Contaminated Past and a Compromised Future
The Case of the Ghent Orphanages (1945-1984)

Knowing that over ¾ of the admitted children still had one or two parents alive at their time of entrance, questions raised about the *raison d' être* of these institutions. To find an answer to this first research question, the population of the more than 1200 children and young people staying in the orphanages between 1945 and 1984 was analysed. It becomes clear that the Ghent orphanages functioned, in the second half of the twentieth century as a system of care for what we today would call youth 'at risk' or 'pre-delinquents' children and not 'orphaned children'. In a second step, we shift our gaze to the role and the functions of these institutions within the broader community of the city of Ghent. Although the population of the orphanages changed, the local authorities continued to use the name orphanage.

1.3.2 Chapter 3

The reform ambitions of the Ghent orphan houses
after the Second World War (1945-1984)

In this third chapter we gain insight into the reform ambitions of the municipal Ghent orphanages by analysing the debates on the most suitable out-of-home-care method for children in the city of Ghent labelled as orphans. A devastating fire that struck the boys orphanage in 1947 initiated a decennia long discussion on the possibility of rebuilding the boys' orphanage or the construction of a brand-new home. These debates shed an interesting light on the different reflections presented as a progressive and renewed educational visions.

1.3.3 Chapter 4

Remembering the Ghent Orphan Houses:
a never ending contested space

After establishing a pertinent quest for recognition throughout the interviews with the former residents of the Ghent orphanages, we dedicate this fourth chapter to determine what this quest entails. What 'kind' of recognition are they talking about? And, what exactly are they asking recognition for? Two elements immediately catch the eye. First, a large part of our respondents strive to disclose their childhood history, their 'shared' childhood of the Ghent orphans. In second instance, an urge to further keep their history alive could be sensed throughout the interviews. The adult care

leavers keep the memory of the Ghent orphanages alive by for example organising a former orphan league and putting up Facebook groups. But then again, the disagreement and conflict between the former orphans concerning their 'shared' past led us to conceptualise the history of the Ghent orphanages as a ‘never-ending contested space’ in order to break open the concept of recognition.

1.3.4 Chapter 5

Challenging the normative truth logic in the politics of apology:
a quest for social justice

From a broader perspective, we found that the current trend to respond to this quest for recognition in the context of out-of-home-care, in countless Western welfare states is to be situated within the so-called 'politics of apology' logic. As an attempt to come to terms with the failure of social welfare policies in a painful past and to repair human injustices, formal inquiries commissioned by (national) authorities into alleged historical abuse of children in public services were set up. As a result, the number of official public apologies increased since the turn of the twenty-first century. In this fifth chapter, we analyse and critique the underlying ‘truth logic’ of public apologies offered by the state in their quest for social justice. We tease out whether historical researchers could challenge this logic by rethinking the relation between ‘the past’ and ‘the present’.

1.3.5 Chapter 6

Puzzling history. The personal file in residential care:
a source for life history and historical research

Since the turn of the century the debate on ‘personal files’ in the context of out-of-home care revived under the influence of large groups of former institutionalised children, claiming their right to get insights into their personal records. This chapter explores the meanings of this historical document as a research source for both the historical researcher and the adult care leaver in the context of the Ghent orphanages (1945-1984). Based on the experiences of the former orphans in consulting their file, we come to the conclusion that the ‘personal files’ of the Ghent orphans provide some new information but at the same time leaves a lot unresolved.

1.3.6 Chapter 7

Discovering different dimensions of research ethics in oral history research:
the complexities of going public in the case of the Ghent orphanages

Chapter 7 can be considered as an ‘alternative’ methodological chapter. In this chapter, we argue that research ethics in the *doing* of oral history research are

inadequately addressed in the existing body of literature. Although oral history researchers have paid considerable attention to *procedural* ethical issues, there is currently a lack of attention for *situational* research ethics in the doing of oral history. We address particular ethical challenges that we experienced while reconstructing the history of three remaining orphanages after the Second World War in the city of Ghent by drawing on our oral history research. Their rather surprising yet pertinent questions enabled us to discover the *political* nature of research ethics, and prompted us to engage in 'going public'.

1.3.7 Chapter 8

General conclusion

In this last chapter we want to summarise on the main conclusions of the research and reflect on three key themes emerging from the main findings of our research.

1.4 References

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Chapter 2

Between a Contaminated Past and a Compromised Future. The Case of the Ghent Orphanages (1945-1984)[4]

4 De Wilde, L. & Vanobbergen, B. Between a Contaminated Past and a Compromised Future. The Case of the Ghent Orphanages.(1945-1984) (Accepted) in *Paedagogica historica:*International Journal of the History of Education.

Abstract

In the past decades, a body of international research concerning residential institutions for children emerged. This chapter focuses on the history of the Ghent orphanages. First, the population of the more than 1200 children and young people resident in the orphanages between 1945 and 1984 is analysed. This analysis illustrates a shift from a legal approach to a normative interpretation of the orphaned child. It becomes clear that the Ghent orphanages functioned, in the second half of the 20th century as a system of care for what we today would call youth 'at risk' or 'pre-delinquents' children and not 'orphaned children'. According to this analysis, the focus shifts to the role and the functions of these institutions within the broader community of the city of Ghent. Although the population of the orphanages changed, the local authorities continued to use the name 'orphanage'. In that vein, we argue that concepts such as 'orphans' and 'orphanages' did not only refer to the classification of certain groups of children, but were also useful tools to protect the social order. An analysis of 45 interviews with both former orphans and educators provides us with an in-depth insight in the complex relationship between the educators and the orphaned children. In this way, the orphanage was not only studied 'from the outside', but also from 'the inside', and by capturing the childhood narratives of former orphaned children it is possible to complement the 'official story' with their interpretation of the past.

2.1 In search of the histories of Ghent orphanages after WWII

> *"Yes,yes, they immediately put you in a black apron, a glimmering black apron. It was probably some kind of sign of being a real orphan, I don't know. Every girl wore an apron there."*[5]

Lisette was one of the 1234 children who enrolled in the Register of Ghent Orphans during the period 1945-1984. The history of the orphanages in Ghent is a long and rich one. Already in the seventh century we can find traces of orphan in care (initiated by several religious institutions) in the city centre. Many centuries later, in 1615, the first orphanage founded by the city of Ghent itself opened its doors. The girls that lived here were called 'de rode lijvekens' ('the red tops') because they were dressed in a long blue skirt and a red top. In 1751 the orphanage moved to the 'rue des Filles-Dieu'. Today this street is officially called the 'Rodelijvekensstraat'. It was there Lisette and her two sisters arrived on August 19, 1959 after their mother had passed away, several years after the death of their father. In the past decades there has been a lot of international research done on residential institutions for children, often related to the topic of child poverty (Dekker, 1985; Head-König, 2010; Jacobi, 2009). Cunningham (1991), for example, analysed the changing images of the children of the poor since the seventeenth century in England in relation to the rise of collective projects towards poor children. Cooter (1992) edited a volume exploring many of the same themes as Cunningham does, using the history of health as its lens. Dekker (2001) points to the growing will to change the child and how the re-education home as a new phenomenon arose in nineteenth century Europe. Of great importance in his analysis are the interconnections between religion, private philanthropy, the role of the government, child science and child welfare legislation. Orphanages have more than once been the research topic of choice. Groenveld, Dekker and Willemse (1997) described in a voluminous work six centuries of care in orphanages and children's homes in the Netherlands. Coldrey (2000) reveals an important field of tension in orphanages referring to the orphanage as a second chance and a refuge for some children while at the same time being a place of terror and degradation for other children. While Jacobi (2009) put another big question forward when policy makers and professionals discussed residential care for children: do foster parents or orphanages provide the most supportive educational environment?

5 All quotes from former orphans (boys and girls) and former staff come from the interviews of our oral history research. The quotes are anonymous and accordingly all names are pseudonyms.

Within the history of the Ghent orphanages these issues were at stake too. Despite their long histories only little academic research has been done up until today. What we do know about these institutions mostly stems from popular literature. Marcel De Bleecker, a former orphan himself, wrote the best-known book about the orphanages in Ghent in 1990. De Bleecker titled the book 'verweesd, verwezen, de geschiedenis van de kulders te Gent' ('To be orphaned, the history of the Kulders of Ghent'). 'Kulders' is the name the orphan boys in Ghent were given by the people, a name which they carried their whole lives. The Ghent orphan boys stayed from 1616 onwards in the 'blue school' this institution was better known by the name of 'kulderschool'. The orphan boys thanked the name 'kulder' to their dress code. They had to wear a typical type of garment called a 'kolder', which was a type of dress-like piece in a nude colour covering the breast and back and assembled at their necks. Above this 'kolder', they wore a blue sleeveless robe.

Our study in the last chapter in the history of the Ghent orphanages tries to fill this lack of scientific research. We focus on the period of 1945 until 1984. During these years the city's boy orphanage fused with the orphanage for girls. After the 'blue girls' had moved to the orphanage in the 'Rodelijvekensstraat' in 1864 and the boys were moved to a brand new institution in the 'Martelaarslaan', these orphanages were run completely separately from each other, each in different parts of town. In 1962 both groups of orphans went to a new home called 'Prince Filip'. Here the girls and boys lived in separate wings of the building in the 'Jubileumlaan' and this would remain so until 1984. We performed our study by implementing two research methods, a document analysis and an oral history research. The documents that were stored in the archives of the Public Centre for Social Welfare in Ghent were a first important source of information. We especially used the personal files of every registered child, the annual reports, the enrolment registers and general policy documents. Second, the narratives of both former orphans and ex-staff members were very important sources for this research. We did 45 interviews, taken from 40 former orphans and 5 ex-staff members, taking place during 2011-2012. The youngest interviewee was 53 years old, the oldest over 90. The average duration of the interviews, which took place at the homes of the interviewees,was approximately two and a half hours and.

In our view, the combination of both research methods enables us to analyse the history of the Ghent orphans and orphanages building upon the concept of 'the child at risk'. Our study needs to be situated within a growing international research tradition on the history of 'the child at risk' (Bakker, Braster, Rietveld-Van Wingerden & Van Gorp, 2007; Dekker, 2007; Mayer, Lohmann & Grosvenor, 2007; Vanobbergen, 2009). Most authors situate the origins of 'the child at risk' at the beginning of the nineteenth century. As does Jacobi (2009), who describes this group of children and the variety of different terms referring to them. Especially by the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century different kind of

institutions were built for orphans, foundlings, vagabonds and abandoned children. They were perceived and presented as valuable solutions to save these 'gangs of unsupervised children' (Connolly, 2008). Looking back to these centuries of the child at risk, Jeroen Dekker concluded: *"The history of children at risk is a story of expansion. It is a story of the birth time and again of new categories of children at risk together with new measures and institutions to tackle these new risks*." (Dekker, 2009, p.18).

This chapter focuses primarily on the processes of admittance to the Ghent orphanages. In the first part of this contribution we analyse the changing definitions of who is regarded as 'the child at risk' related to the populations of the Ghent orphanages shortly after World War II. By analysing the population of the more than 1200 children and young people that stayed in the orphanages between 1945 and 1984 we will illustrate the shift from a legal to a normative interpretation of the orphaned child. The Ghent orphanages functioned as a system of care for what we today would call youth 'at risk' or 'pre-delinquents' children (Ferguson, 2007) and not 'orphaned children'. In the second part, we shift our gaze to the role and the functions of these institutions within the broader community of the city of Ghent. Although the population of the orphanages has changed, the local authorities kept using terms as 'orphan' and 'orphanage'. As we did not only study the orphanage 'from the outside', but also from 'the inside' by capturing the childhood narratives of former orphaned children we are able to replete the 'official story' with their interpretation of the past. It becomes clear that the 'orphan discourse' did more than classify certain groups of children, it appeared to be a useful tool to protect the (future) social order.

2.2 From a legal to a normative interpretation of the orphaned child

Between the two World Wars the population of the Ghent orphan houses gradually changed. This change became extremely significant after the Second World War. In the next section we will describe this important shift by presenting an analysis of the changing population and the evolving criteria for admittance.

2.2.1 From "double orphans" to "social cases"

Already in 1811, the authorities made a distinction between orphans, foundlings and abandoned children. According to the imperial decree of January 19 that year, orphans were distinguished from the 'foundlings' and 'abandoned children' based on the idea that orphaned children did not have, according to the decree, a father, nor

did they have a mother.[6] Orphans also did not have the means to provide for their own livelihood. This distinction led to different types of care in respect to the three categories of children. The children labelled as orphans usually ended up in collective residential care, an orphanage. This was for centuries also the case in the city of Ghent. The orphanages organised by the city itself were predominantly reserved for children whose parent(s) were deceased.

By the start of the twentieth century this slowly but surely started to change. As a result, for the first time in 1940, there were more so-called 'social cases' children than orphaned children staying in Ghent orphan houses. This evolution fully developed after WWII. Subsequently in the post-war period the majority of the parent(s) of the orphaned children were still alive at the time of their admission.

Depending on the source of information (annual reports versus personal files of the children) the figures vary slightly, but in more than 80% of the cases 'being without parents' was not the (main) criterion to admit children. This surprising ascertainment demands clarification.

(%)	Double orphan	Maternal orphan	Paternal orphan	Social case
Boys	3,31%	5,29%	4,52%	86,88%
Girls	1,58%	9,88%	2,27%	86,27%

Table 3. Population percentages 1945-1984 bases on the annual reports

Despite the common belief in orphanages as places to house parentless children, very few of the children living in an orphanage during the second half of the twentieth century were 'true' or 'real' orphans (Connolly, 2008; Groenveld, Dekker & Willemse, 1997; Hacsi, 1997; Raftery & 0' Sullivan, 1999; Vehkalaht, 2009). This conclusion brought us to a closer examination of the various and evolving reasons of admission to the Ghent orphan houses. We were especially interested in what was considered as 'a social case'. In the post-war period up to the 1950s only two reasons for admittance were identified in the personal files of the children. Either the child was categorised in

6 "Foundlings are those who are born to an unknown father and mother, found in a public place, or brought to a particular hospice (or alms-house)" (Article 2). " Abandoned children are born with a known mother and father and are first raised by them, or by other persons without being responsible, they are left behind without knowing what became of the fathers and mothers and without being able to return to them" (Art. 5). "Orphans are those who have neither father nor mother, and have no means of livelihood either"(Art. 6). (Own translation).

the register as a maternal and/or paternal orphan (18%) or as a 'social case[7]' (82%). The former refers to the death of one or both parents; the latter class refers to children whose parent(s) 'were not able to take care of them'. By the end of the 1960s 'not able to take care of your child' became more specific and varied defined in terms of 'moral incompetence', 'unfavourable family situation', 'difficulties with the concubine', hospitalisation, pregnancy, disease, moral or social neglect, poor housing and intoxication why a decent education could no longer be guaranteed. However, the family backgrounds remained the same. The majority of the children (70%) ended up in a Ghent orphanage due to a divorce of their parents. A single-parent family was considered as a high risk environment. Next to this, unmarried couples (especially the unmarried mother) that lived together, but were not married, were considered anything but more favourable. The partner was appointed as a 'concubine' or it was written that 'they lived in concubinage'. Both contexts were labelled as unsuitable.

Jacobi (2009) points in this regard towards a shift that has taken place in the conceptualisation of 'the child in danger'. Initially these children were considered as problematic by referring to their legal status. In the course of the twentieth century a change towards a more normative definition of 'the child in danger' occurred. *"The twentieth-century term 'children at risk' deliberately takes a normative view of child development and the sheltered circumstances of childhood. Terms such as "orphan" or "foundling" do not have such normative connotations, but instead relate to the specific legal status of children whose parents were unable to take care of them"* (Jacobi, 2009, p. 54). Even though this variety of terms (children at risk, orphans or foundlings) refer to the same groups of children, the underlying assumption differs. The older terms refer to parents not being able to take care of their children due to physical absence. The twentieth century terms refer to parents considered not being good enough to provide for their children.

This shift towards a more normative interpretation of 'the child in danger' brings us to the conclusion that the group of Ghent orphans labelled as 'social cases' were considered to be 'morally endangered' children, or in the words of Schafer (1997) 'morally abandoned' ones. Analyses of the reports of the board of directors of the Ghent orphanages show a similar view of the population within the orphanages:

"Some, if not all of our pupils, come from very low environments. When they are brought to us, they carry a hereditarily burden. They carry in them, not the fault of their parents but the likelihood to make them later in life, the long term contact with

7 Not all 'social cases' were allowed. Four formal criteria can be distinguished. 1. the minimum age for a child to enter the orphanage was three years old. 2., the child had to be (initially) born within wedlock. 3. the child's family had to live within the authorative boundaries of Ghent. 4. a physical and psychological examination. If a child failed these tests he or she did not get accepted, but was redirected for a 'cure' to another institution, a colony for weak children or a re-educational institute.

this environment during their childhood already left a mark on their personalities." [8] *The children were in 'moral danger' since their parental environment was considered to be a place full of weaknesses and neglect. In the words of Ferguson (2007) the focus lay on "a particular (lower) class of family, these children were the 'moral dirt' of a social order determined to prove its 'purity', and other children and good citizens needed to be protected from their 'contaminating' influences".*

The idea that these children were 'at risk' of losing their innocence due to pernicious family influences reveals a great deal on how the concept of childhood was understood. Children were primarily considered to be 'innocent beings'. Therefore society had to step up in a threatening situation in order to 'give them their innocence back' (Connolly, 2008; Ferguson, 2007b). One could say that orphanages seemed to be reinvented during the second half of the twentieth century as they took in primarily neglected and endangered children of parents who were judged as incapable (Connolly, 2008; Vehkalahti, 2009). However, the mere presence of various forms of familial disorder was 'not enough' to get admitted in an orphanage. A problematic educational situation as described above had to be experienced or perceived as hopeless and threatening by society (Verhellen, 1991). The role of what Schafer (1997) has called 'ordinary people caught in the mechanism of official investigation' cannot be underestimated in this context. The citizens of Ghent played a crucial role in the procedure leading up to the placement of these children as they were pulling the alarm bell. Their 'moral condemnation' based on signs of 'moral dangers' was the beginning of a possible placement of the child. Their request, made by two types of applicants, gave rise to the 'voluntary' or 'judicial' placement of the child(ren). In this a striking gender difference becomes clear. On the one hand family members (stepparents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, the child itself), neighbours, the police or the juvenile court could file the application. This was especially the case for girls (68%) in contrast to boys (38%). On the other hand parents could request the placement of their child(ren) themselves. This was the case for 62% of boys and for 32% of girls.

Reconstructing the admission process or procedure of the Ghent orphanages in detail remains a tricky challenge. Much has to do with "the lack of adequate assessments prior to a child entering" that Garrett (2010, p. 30) points to in his research of Irish industrial schools. Although reference to an 'official investigation' was made on a regular basis, only a few documents elaborate on this inquiry or else describe the procedure in vague terms. A draft version of a document concerning the application and the admittance of a placement by the secretary of the Bureau for Social Welfare shows how this process was described as a challenging mission:

8 Box 6: 006-02/1/2010/34 Extract from the register of the debating's of the commission of social welfare of Ghent. Meeting on Wednesday, August 19, 1953. Archive Bureau of Social Welfare Ghent.

"The justification of a placement is a difficult task. The reasons why the placement of a child is requested are from the most diverse nature. Usually there is a 'tension' around such a question which makes it difficult to get an objective insight. It is a strong 'emotional charged world' that is not always approached in a peaceful manner. And too often, the placement has a 'mandatory character'."

This document indicates that there was generally little time for the authorities to carry out an extensive investigation into the family situation. The application was treated as urgent each time. Consequently, the decision on whether or not to the children could be admitted had to happen within a short time.

2.2.2 From a "contaminating" to a "favourable" environment

The concern of policy makers and the directors of the orphanages clearly lay in the alleged precarious family situation of the children. 'Alleged' in terms of 'presumed' as moral endangerment or abandonment can never be perceived directly (Schafer, 1997). It was assumed within the prevailing societal standards of that time. The representatives of the Bureau of Social Welfare specifically labelled the primary backgrounds or families of the children in the personal files as 'ragged', anti-social or 'educational hazard'. Therefore, it was considered important and necessary for the children to grow up as soon as possible in a more 'favourable' environment. The educational view of this group of children mainly intended to set these 'social cases' free and protect them from the same sad fate as their parents. The child in danger would in time become the dangerous child (Christiaens, 1999; Ferguson, 2007). It was important to avoid children choosing the same depraved way of life as their parents, and therefore a clear re-education project needed to be installed. According to the board of directors, the educators had the important task of taking over the responsibilities of the parents because they did not meet the demands.[9] The idea that a more favourable environment could act as a deterrent if and only if the contamination or bad influences were stopped at an early stage was generally assumed. The isolation of the children was termed as a treatment, a solution or a cure. The idea of being in 'moral danger' had the character of a kind of disease that could be healed by withdrawing the children from their unhealthy home environments. These children had to be 'normalised' through discipline and labour so they would grow up to be citizens with 'domestic and social virtues'. For the girls the

9 Box 6: 006-02/1/2010/36 Document De Coster at the address of the permanent bureau, at their request in regard to the vision of education. 29/10/1964. Archives Bureau of Social Welfare, Ghent.

emphasis was on preparing them for their future household[10], and for the boys the learning of a trade.[11]

Intervening in the private educational sphere by the local authorities would not have been possible without the Law on Child and Youth Protection voted on 15 May 1912. It is not possible within the scope of this contribution to go into detail on this so we will limit ourselves to a few key points. The law of 1912 was a specific response to the social risk of juvenile delinquency. The idea was that the state had to intervene on time and re-educate the young offenders to avoid these minors relapsing later in life. The focus was therefore on the potential delinquent child (Christiaens, 1999). At the same time this law is considered a milestone in the care and protection for all children and for children at risk in particular. Due to the introduction of this law the state was given the right *"to invade in the sanctuary of the family"* (De Smaele, 2002, p. 364). The core of the child legislation was that the responsibility of education rests with the parents but external interventions are possible when, measured to societal standards, the parents do not or insufficiently take on their educational responsibility. In that case the state can intervene and take action, in the 'best interest of the child', to compensate for the parental educational deficit. This compensation was deemed necessary to protect society by ensuring that children got the desired education, through correcting undesirable parental behaviour and re-educating young delinquents (Bouverne-De Bie & Roose, 2009). The educational responsibility then lies with the state and an intervention in the form of an alternative education becomes necessary.

2.3 Becoming an orphaned child

The shift from a legal towards a normative interpretation of the orphaned child did not result in the disappearance of the orphanages in the city of Ghent after World War II. On the contrary, the last Ghent orphanage only closed its doors in 1984. The children were over the course of these forty years still addressed and considered to be ‘kulders’, poor orphans and parentless children by themselves, the Bureau of Social Welfare and society. Even until today the children of that time see themselves as former orphans and address each other as ‘orphans’. In other words, the discourse concerning this group of children did not fundamentally alter, even though the population of the orphanages clearly did.

10 Annual report 1957. Archives Bureau of Social Welfare, Ghent

11 Rurniture, metal worker, wood turner, frame maker, printer, warehouseman, gardener and car mechanicer.

Why the local authorities and the board members kept constructing notions as 'the orphan' and 'the orphan house' is therefore an intriguing question. Hence, we dug into the archival material and sifted through the interviews to shed light on the social dynamics of these institutions from the 'inside out'. We consider if and how this discourse can been seen as an instrument of governmental interfering by the authorities of the city of Ghent. We explore in this second part of the chapter how 'the orphan-discourse' was used as a public rhetoric for (future) social control.

First of all, the label 'orphan' clearly functioned as a legitimation of state intervention. Throughout the stories of the former orphaned children, for example, the strong belief that nobody outside the orphan house could take care of them was a running thread. In the words of the former orphans:

> *"We were brought up on the idea: you better be happy to be here [Prince Filip] because at home they don't want you anymore. Eventually you swallow the story and you think it is true."*

> *"They always made it very clear at Prince Filip, that we were nothing. So they told us that we should be very happy to be there because neither our mother nor father wanted us."*

In the different interviews it is remarkable how these men and women were taught during their childhood in the orphan house to grow up to be and to see themselves as 'an orphan'. They did not enter the orphan house as an orphan, but once they left they had become 'an orphan'.

Labelling these children as orphaned and as a consequence as parentless children almost automatically authorised their placement in an orphanage. It was presumed that no one else could take care of them. The children were convinced that their parents didn't want them anymore or were not allowed to care for them. The representatives of the city of Ghent were convinced that the parents weren't able (anymore) to educate their children. This shows similarities with Murdoch's research on poor families in London in the twentieth century. As in her view: *"the best way to prove that the children in question were indeed in need of rescue was to establish that the parents or guardians were either absent or abusive"* (Murdoch, 2006, p.17). The parents were made invisible.

The presence of the parent(s) (or other family members) in the lives of the orphans was very limited according to the childhood stories of the former orphaned children. In spite of the attempts to assign the parents a more important role over the years, the absence of or limited contact with their parents turned out to be a common theme throughout all the interviews.

> *"You had a mother, you wanted to tell her everything but she was never there. I was often angry and sad. 'Why does this happen to me?" We also had few visitors, very few."*

Many former orphans stressed strongly that the largest or heaviest punishment entailed the withholding of their visiting rights. In that case the penalised child had to skip a number of visits on Sunday.

"Not being allowed to go home on Sundays, so no visit to your parents. In fact that was the most severe punishment." In other cases, none of the parents got authorised by the Bureau of Social Welfare to go and visit their children. Or they didn't visit, for various reasons of their own accord:

> *"My parents came when they felt like it. Once every three months but if I got punished it was every six months. As a child you don't forget something like this."*

The children surely didn't have a clear perspective of their own family situation but also their view on the reasons why the other children were admitted in the orphanage were unclear.

> *"Whether there were many children whose parents had died, I do not know. Maybe many children of divorced parents? I never asked, but yes, we are orphans. I was a maternal orphan, at least that is what they said."*

This shows how and why the Ghent authorities made use of this 'orphan-discourse' in the same way as "reformers use the rhetoric of class, race, and nationality to distance children from their families and local communities"(Murdoch, 2006).

Secondly, the persistence of the notion of 'orphan' equally serves as a legitimation to avoid discussions on (child) poverty. In labelling them as 'orphans' the problems the children and their families struggled with were obscured. In the records of the Bureau of Social Welfare the families are described as 'inferior environments' and 'antisocial families'. There is no record of 'children in poverty', and there are no discussions on poverty in relation to the children's placement, even though it was clear that most of the children lived in the poorest neighbourhoods characterised, for example, by very bad housing conditions. Dekker confirms the fact that mainly problems of a material and/or financial nature gave rise to an admittance in an orphanage (Dekker, 2006). The complex causes of the problems of these families were simplified and defined as the failure of a particular family and the pauper child being the encapsulated form of the child at risk (Turmel, 2008).

Ferguson (2007) refers to these processes as 'the criminalisation of poverty' since the state placed the children of the poor into care rather than providing structural support for their families in need. The solution was not found in helping these families to ameliorate their living conditions but in cutting away the children from their pernicious family core. Within this discourse it is neither surprising that the Ghent orphanages were never up for debate or fundamentally questioned.

On the contrary, the continuing persistence of the label 'orphan' and the corresponding institutions seem to have been a rewarding tool for the Ghent society. The family, the school, and the community need to be seen as sites of governing, as since the end of the eighteenth century the family, the school and other educational institutions "*have been subjects of regulating the intimate relations interest and aspirations as an instrument of regulating populations"* (Bloch, Holmund, Moqvist & Popkewitz, 2003). Linking the enduring labelling of this group of children as orphans to the idea of *governmentality* offers an interesting perspective. According to Mayer, Lohmann & Grosvenor (2009) we consequently can understand these institutions as a means of surveillance and as tools for monitoring and disciplining urban populations. The reformers had a strong focus directed towards the lower strata of society and created in that way a separate class of poor children whilst suggesting *"that with intervention and assistance these urban youths, unlike their parents, could eventually evolve into [English] citizens"* (Murdoch, 2006, p.25).

Ferguson's view on these state interventions is that: *"it is impossible to exaggerate the symbolic power that these children and their families had in the social order"* (Ferguson, 2007, p.133). However, the 'average man in the street' doesn't get off easily either. In his idea the community played a key role in supporting these kinds of placements. In the case of the Ghent orphanages this became clear when discussing who filed applications for admission. This becomes even more evident in the dual or even paradoxical perspective of these 'at risk' children by the citizens of Ghent. When the former orphans tell about the encounters between them and the 'outside world' they were more aware of their 'orphan status' than ever.

> *"Many parents of the 'city children' said: 'those are orphans you can't consort with them'. They could easily recognise us because we were all dressed alike."*

The label 'orphan' apparently gave rise to reactions of pity as well as verbal abuse or ill-disposed reactions. For instance during the Sunday walks or when performing with the fanfare the orphaned children got sweets or some small change but at the same time got blamed for being lazy, vandals, fools or liars by the citizens of Ghent.

> *"The people felt sorry for us. Sometimes we got something, sweets or this and that. 'The orphans, the orphans!' they cried. We didn't know better. But once at school, this completely changed. Blamed by the teacher and by the 'city children'. We were sitting on the last bench, orphans always had to sit in the back. And in the long run you become aggressive, you begin to revolt."*

As we have shown social problems like poverty were redefined in terms of an educational problem. We therefore, in third instance shift our gaze towards the educational project within the walls of the orphanages. According to Groenveld, Dekker & Willemse (1997) the reforming of children threatening to grow up 'socially dangerous' was exactly the core task of 'the institution'. Assuming that these children carry a 'birth-sin', the focus of the educational project lays in correcting and controlling the behaviour of the children. The idea was to mould these children through the regime into good citizens in the eyes of the Church and State (Ferguson, 2007). The educational project focused on the individual child. However, the (undesirable) conduct of the child was never at stake in the admission procedures. Once admitted in the orphanage the 'treatment' focalised solely the individual character or behaviour of the children. This concern with and surveillance of individual conduct became the central remedy in what can be called a 'moral regulation' project (Driver, 1993). The aspiration was to create the ideal human being which was an adult whom had a normal career path and could take care of himself, as evidenced in the annual report of 1973:[12]

"It's good to live in our society. It ensures prosperity to everyone who meets the ideal human-type; a physical and psychologically healthy person with a normal working career. But there are many who cannot cope with this fixed ideal type, partly by factors in their personality, in their environment and in the rapidly changing society. Hence, we provide care that is 'problem-centred' and strongly 'solution-oriented'."

The goal of the regime, to make the perfect future citizen, was achieved through a lot of different daily practices. As Vehkalahti elucidates for her research of reformatory schools in Finland: *"the children's reformatory identity was built piece by piece in the everyday practices of the reform school"* (Vehkalahti, 2009, p. xvii). We come to a similar conclusion for the Ghent orphanages. For example, many prizes were handed out to 'diligent orphans'. The ten most deserving children, five boys and five girls, annually got the 'Legaat Chomette'[13] awarded by the city government of Ghent. Based on their educational achievements and their good conduct in the orphan house an

12 Annual report 1973. Archives Bureau of Social Welfare, Ghent.
13 Box 1: 006-02/1/2010/1 Decisions of the 'permanent bureau' 1978-1983.

amount of 31,000 Belgian francs[14] was divided among them. These orphaned children were little by little moulded into 'usable' future citizens: *"We must strive for our children to educate them to become fully usable members of society", or in other words, "educating them into good and virtuous citizens".*[15]

This discloses the main emphasis of the re-education regime, which was on life after the orphanage:

"However in the future we will row against the overindulgence. The emphasis has to be shifted towards the factor: "What AFTER my stay in the home?"[16]

In analysing the 'orphan-discourse' we demonstrated why and how these children were created as 'the other' (Ferguson, 2007) in order to become 'the same' in the future. The idea was that saving these 'poor children' by educating them into usable and valuable citizens held the promise of improving society in the long run.

The directors of the Ghent orphanages hoped that once these children were saved, they would influence their families to adopt a middle-class lifestyle (Connolly, 2008).

2.4 Concluding reflection

In looking back with the former orphans, thirty years after the last orphanage closed its doors in the city of Ghent, it became rapidly clear that 'finding their place in the (Ghent) society' turned out to be nothing less than difficult. Many of them eventually found their way. For several it is still an uphill battle; others 'threw in the towel' many years ago. As they remember their 'discharge moment' from the orphan house the same tenor in their stories was heard time and time again: the transition from the orphanage to society did not run smoothly. The moment the children had to leave the orphanage came unexpectedly and abruptly. Whether they went to live back home or went to stand on their own feet, there was no way back.

14 Approximately € 775.
15 Summary of a study by Mr. G. The Vriendt, President of the Belgian Federation of Old-orphans leagues. This study was presented at the 49th Congress of the General Union of Being Belgium at Kortrijk on June 9, 1957.
16 Annual Report, 1969. Archives Bureau of Social Welfare, Ghent.

> *"The problem was that we couldn't even provide our own meals. 'I must say, I have learned everything on my own. If you weren't strong enough, you're irretrievably lost. I know people who have hanged themselves because they could not cope. You're brought up amongst all these different persons. So we are supposedly brothers. That hurts. My freedom was actually the biggest problem. Few who went to live alone could handle money. Me neither. I had two savings books, in three months they were empty."*

During every encounter we got the same message: their greatest desire, leaving the orphanage, became for various reasons one of the most difficult times in their life. Some of them found it very difficult to suddenly live alone, while others could hardly adapt to family life. In addition, many of them struggled with addiction problems, came into contact with crime, and in some extreme cases, culminated in suicide. Those who have managed to build up a 'normal (family) life' generally attribute that success to their perseverance 'thanks to' or 'despite of' the orphanage, their life partner or concerned (foster) family members.

Saving these 'gangs of unsupervised children' by isolating them from their families and re-educating them into valuable future citizens with the potential to contribute in a positive way to society turned out to be difficult to realise. Up until today the majority of the former orphans perceive themselves to be different from their fellow citizens. They still speak in terms of 'us' (the group of former orphans) and 'them', referring to the 'civilians' of the city of Ghent. The long stay in the orphanage has left a mark on their future lives but not in the way the board of the Bureau of Social Welfare had intended it. As a former orphaned girl concludes: *"The past is gone, that's true but I still have to live with it every day".*

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Chapter 3

The reform ambitions of the Ghent orphan houses after the Second World War (1945–1984)[17]

Abstract

In this chapter, we gain insight into the reform ambitions of the municipal Ghent orphanages by analysing the debates from the end of the Second World War up to 1984 about the most suitable out-of-home-care method for children labelled as orphans. Especially the long discussions about the possibility of rebuilding the boys' orphanage or the construction of a brand-new home for the orphaned children, shed an interesting light on the different reflections presented as a progressive and renewed educational vision. Notions such as 'pavilion system', 'institution pedagogy', 'domesticity' and 'coeducation' were reconsidered and discussed. However, these modern educational ambitions seemed not to have changed the elementary pedagogical mission of these institutions.

17 De Wilde, L. & Vanobbergen, B. (Accepted) The reform ambitions of the Ghent orphan houses after the Second World War (1945–1984).In *'For your own good' Research on Youth justice practices*. Bruseel: VUB.

3.1 Situating the Ghent orphan houses after World War II

In the past decades, there has been a lot of international research done on residential institutions for children, often related to the topic of child poverty (Dekker, 1985; Hasci, 1997; Head-Köning, 2010; Tiffin, 1982). Cunningham (1991), for example, analysed the changing images of the children of the poor since the seventeenth century in England in relation to the rise of collective projects towards poor children. Cooter (1992) edited a volume exploring many of the same themes as Cunningham does, using the history of health as its lens. Dekker (2001) pointed to the growing will to change the child and explored how the re-education home as a new phenomenon arose in nineteenth-century Europe. Of great importance in his analysis are the interconnections between religion, private philanthropy, the role of the government, child science and child welfare legislation. Orphanages have more than once been the research topic of choice. Groenveld, Dekker and Willemse (1997) described in a voluminous work six centuries of care in orphanages and children's homes in the Netherlands. Coldrey (2000) revealed an important field of tension in orphanages referring to the orphanage as a second chance and a refuge for some children while at the same time it was a place of terror and degradation for other children. Jacobi (2009) put another big question forward. Policy makers and professionals discussed residential care for children, whether foster parents or orphanages provide the most supportive educational environment. An age-old debate that flared up during the last decades of the existence of the Ghent orphanages.

This large range of international research on institutions for 'homeless children' focuses primarily on analysing and contextualizing institutions prior to the Second World War. Research on governmental initiatives towards this group of 'homeless children' in the second half of the twentieth century is sparse. The attention in that period is largely focused on out-of-home care for children within the juridical framework of 'Special Youth Care' (Christiaens, 1999; Dekker, 2012; De Koster, 2010; Van der Brucht, 2007). During our research on the Ghent orphanages it became apparent that the position of these institutions after the Second World War within the developing field of child protection is not clear. The Ghent orphanages are nevertheless a distinct illustration of a policy of prevention, intervention and protection towards children considered at risk. In this way the case study of the post-war period of the Ghent orphanages can broaden the research of 100 years of 'Special Youth Care' in Belgium.

The city of Ghent has a long history of orphan care. The first municipal orphanages for boys and girls were founded as early as the seventeenth century by the Bureau of Social Welfare.[18] These institutions were separated by sex and were principally reserved for children whose parent(s) were deceased and were therefore labelled as orphans. Within the two still remaining orphanages[19] after the Second World War, an interesting population shift occurred, in 1940, for the first time, there were more so-called 'social cases' than orphaned children. This evolution developed fully after the war. Subsequently in the last decades of the history of the Ghent orphanages the majority of the parents of these orphaned children were still alive at the time of the child's admission.[20] The grounds for admitting these children are to be found in the perceived high-risk educational situation they lived in. The admission reasons lay with their families, more specifically within the parental situation. The families of origin were perceived as so-called antisocial families that were scrutinised, not solely in Ghent or Belgium, during the post-war recovery within the child welfare and protection framework (Dekker, 2012). In other words, these 'orphaned children' today would be considered as children living in a 'problematic educational situation'.

The Ghent orphanages organised by the city of Ghent fell under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Social Welfare that was renamed the Public Centre for Social Welfare in 1976.[21] Within the Bureau of Social Welfare two departments were of great importance, the so-called 'permanent bureau'[22] and the 'special committee'.[23] The permanent bureau dealt with 'matters of daily management', which were not determined by law (Verschraegen, 2001). These tasks were assigned by the chairman and the board of the municipality. The mission of the special committee for social services was slightly different and mainly consisted of dealing with the files related to individual social services. The authorities of the committee were also assigned by the Board (Verschraegen, 2001).

18 By the law of 10 March 1925 the Commission of Civil Hospices was replaced by the Bureau of Social Welfare (COO). However, the law retained the distinction between the categories and the interpretation of orphans, foundlings and abandoned children, as described in the imperial decree of 18 January 1811. They were still in charge of the dual task of providing and educating.

19 One for the orphan boys in Martelaarslaan (1873–1962), which was largely destroyed by a fire in 1947 and one for the girls in Rodelijvekensstraat (1751–1962).

20 The Register of Ghent Orphans enrolled 1234 children during the period 1945–1984. Depending on the source of information (annual reports versus personal files of the children) the figures vary slightly, but overall we can state that after World War II more than 75% of the children still had at least one parent alive at the time he or she was admitted in a Ghent orphanage.

21 Renamed by the Act of 8 July 1976 as Public Centres for Social Welfare (OCMW). The governing bodies of the OCMW side are the board, the president, the permanent bureau and the special committees.

22 Which consists of five members; four members of the COO and the chairman of the COO/OCMW board, who is also the legal chairman of the permanent bureau.

23 The social welfare council may establish special committees to which they can also transfer responsibilities.

The written records of the debates concerning the structural changes not only shed light on the altering educational views, but also show that the social welfare bureau of Ghent considered (and helped to shape) the various prevailing views of that time on out-of-home care. These long discussions were launched in 1947 just after the devastating fire[24] in the boys' orphanage and eventually ended with the closing down of the last home. All through the last decades we gain insight into the desirable educational project and several shifts within the educational ambitions. Our main sources in (re)constructing this part of the history of the Ghent orphan houses are the archives of the Public Centre for Social Welfare. This holds the annual reports of the boys and girls division, the correspondence between both headmasters of the orphanages, the guardians, the board of the Bureau of Social Welfare, the 'permanent bureau' and the 'special committee' of the Public Centre for Social Welfare in Ghent.

3.2 Planning the future of the Ghent orphanages

In this case study we encounter a decades-long discussion about the future of the Ghent orphanages. During this time period different plans and options were put forward. The initial plan in 1947, following the fire that destroyed over half of the orphanage in the Martelaarslaan, was according to the records 'an exact re-substantiation of the institution, with attention to modernization and improvement'. Almost one year later, the board concluded that the infrastructure for the orphan girls was also very outdated; making it opportune to build a joint institution for both boys and girls.

This idea was waived in 1949, since research had shown '*that embellishment of these buildings could no longer meet the modern requirements of pedagogy*'.[25] The first plan was back on the table: rebuilding the boys' orphanage according to the former building style. In June 1950, a proposal to modernise the boys' orphanage was entirely rejected by the Ministry of Public Health. The Ministry considered it necessary to build a new institution according to the '*pavillonnair* system', if the Bureau of Social Welfare wanted to 'count on the necessary approval of the Senior Government' and wanted to receive a state grant to cover 60 per cent of the costs. Following this verdict, later that year, several consultations with the Ministry took place. The result was that numerous changes were imposed to the plans, in terms of size, orientation and layout of the premises. In the meantime, the five pavilions became seven, and in March 1952 when officially submitting the pre-designs, nine pavilions were foreseen.

24 On 23 August 1947 around 7.30 a.m.
25 006-02/1/2010/34 Correspondence related to the construction of the girls' section of the home 'Prince Filip', 1952-1978.

The dossier remained with the city council until the end of 1952. At that time a meeting took place under the chairmanship of mayor Claeys.[26] It turned out that the city of Ghent did not agree with the drawn up plan. The estimated expenses were considered to be out of proportion to the current population of the institution. A proposal was made to discuss this matter with the Ministry to come to a fixed starting point.

In December 1952, it was hastily decided to carry out some important renovation works in the girls' home in view of the threatened collapse of the rear wing afflicted with age. Urgent improvement work was deemed necessary. At the beginning of 1953 this judgement, in agreement with the city council, was overruled. It was decided to create an entire new orphanage for girls, preferably on the same site and with the same educational vision as the boys' orphanage.

After several comparative studies it was decided, in order to save expense, to build a minimum number of pavilions. There would be five pavilions, including a central building (executive housing and communal services). The educational method should have preferably been as much as possible inspired by the *pavillonair* system: age groups with 15 to 16 boys or girls under the supervision of a resident staff member. Although some issues were still undecided,[27] the Committee of Social Welfare of Ghent came to a conclusion on 19 August 1953 for the basic design of the new Ghent orphanage. The resolution specified the following key idea: '*the characteristics of the beliefs that currently seem to be favoured are: the spread of the services connected directly to education (pavillonnair system) and for the other services centralisation (rationalisation) is preferred*'[28].

3.2.1 Out-of-home care: a two-way story?

This strong belief in 'the pavilion system' was embedded in a national and international movement. The Bureau of Social Welfare stated: '*everywhere the aim is to abolish the old "barrack orphanage" and replace it by the modern pavilion system. France, Switzerland and the Netherlands set the tone in this area*'.[29] In the correspondence furthermore a reference was made to two Belgian examples of this pavilion system, firstly to the sanatorium of Marcinelle[30] and a second reference was made to the 'central observation institution of Mol' that consisted after the Second

26 Leopold Emiel Claeys (1894–1984) was a Belgian politician for the Christian-Democrats and was mayor of the city of Ghent twice, 1947-1952 and 1959–1970.
27 Will there be a central laundry? A hospital? A gym and a party hall? Which heating system? And so on.
28 006-02/1/2010/34 Correspondence related to the construction of the girls section of the home 'Prince Filip'.1952-1978.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.

World War of eight pavilions. This centre was renamed in 1921 as a 'special institution with a *school farmhouse* for abnormals' (Terryn, 2005). After the initial observation in the reception pavilion, each incoming boy was placed in one of six regular pavilions. The pavilions were classified according to age groups. This was however not determined by the chronological age but based on their '*avancement bio-psychique*' or their '*âge bio-moral*' (Terryn, 2005). Led by Maurice Rouvroy[31] this institution was organised through communities because this would allegedly offer a more familial atmosphere. It was Rouvry himself who introduced this pavillon system:

La question pour nous est de rapprocher notre cadre du cadre normal, du cadre familial. C'est le sectionnement par petits groupes qui s'impose donc dans ce sens. […] L'unité éducative doute être le groupe vivant en famille. C'est le système pavillonnaire seul qui nous mènera là.[32] (Terryn, 2005, p. 117).

According to the research of De Koster (2007), the belief in the favoured method of living in community groups was attributable to its resemblance to the structure of family life.

It was the general international conviction that the emergence of the so-called pavilion system would result in extra attention for the individual personality of each child and out-of-home education would get a more homely character (Bakker, 2009). This system was appraised as a compromise between residential and familial placement and therefore seen as a possible answer to the widespread dislike for both these forms of care (De Keyser, 1985). Nevertheless we can state that the belief in residential institutions was still pervasive in the first half of the twentieth century (in Belgium) (De Fever, Grietens & Hellinckx, 2001; Vanderplasschen, Vandevelde, Claes, Broekaert & Van Hove, 2006), as at the same time the method of placement of 'homeless children' was consequently put forward as a topic of discussion on the (inter)national agenda.

Various international conferences on the protection of the child[33] at the beginning of the twentieth century specifically discussed the manner of placement of children

31 Headmaster from 1913 to 1945. Rouvroy introduced the pavilion system, which was marked by a familial character and by a certain form of self-management. The 'Central Observation Institute' was constructed like a city with streets, houses and a store. In his
conceptions of delinquency, education, and re-education and in his programme for the care of
children with psycho-social problems, Rouvroy was influenced by experimental paedology and by the New School Movement (D'hoker, 1990)

32 'The question for us is to adjust our framework to a normal framework, the family. This dividing in small groups is therefore necessary. [...] The educational core is living in a family group. Only the *pavillionair* system enables this.'

33 e.g. 'Les congrès internationaux sur le patronage et sur la protection de l'enfance' at Antwerp in 1890, at Paris in 1894 and 1898, and in 1900 at Brussels.

labelled as orphans. During the debates, the participants elaborated on the question: 'Comment assurer la garde de ces enfants: dans des collectivités, selon la méthode Anglo-Saxonne, ou en placement familial comme cela se pratiquait en France?'[34] (Rollet, 2001, p. 11) This immediately brings forward the two possible out-of-home care varieties, placing both options within two different traditions.

The Anglo-Saxon method preferred to lodge children jointly in an institution, the French tradition opted for a 'familial placement'. While both methods intended to ensure the protection of the child 'at risk', they were very different in how they wanted to realise this. In these debates the pros and cons of a certain tradition were discussed (Dickx, 2003). For opponents of the Anglo-Saxon method the main argument against was the lack of the positive influence of a family context. A second often mentioned counter-argument dealt with the relationship between the children and the world outside the institution. The awareness of the almost complete isolation and the possible negative consequences of a prolonged stay in an institution was translated in concepts such as the 'institutionalisation (*verstichting*) of the child' or 'asylum dementia'. Not everyone saw this lack of social contact outside the institution as negative. Defenders of the Anglo-Saxon method saw seclusion from society and subsequently from the sinful influence of the outside world as beneficial.

Besides residential care, the family placement or boarding out of children was and still is a widely followed method. From the beginning of the twentieth century this method rapidly gained supporters. It was assumed at that time that this French care system brought together the needs of the two parties involved. The foster parent(s) get the children they lack and the children get the parents they long for. A second perceived advantage of the system was that the label 'institutionalised child (*instellingskind*)' disappeared and a final advantage, according to the followers of the French method was that this method still remained less expensive than collective care. Proponents were convinced that family placement could lead to good results assuming it is done in a thoughtful manner. The children should not simply be placed; the families must ensure that the children entrusted to them, will be treated well and will be cared for.

During the first half of the twentieth century this twofold debate was pivotal at the different conferences, to refute the pros and con arguments which eventually resulted in alternative out-of-home care initiatives. As Kruithof (2008) describes in an overview of a century of Dutch child protection, the big question on how to re-educate children lingered. At the beginning of the twentieth century neither option was satisfactory since institutions were seen as a necessary evil in which no education

34 'How to ensure the care of these children: in communities, according to the Anglo-Saxon method, or in foster care as practised in France.'

in a familial atmosphere would ever be possible and foster homes were not ideal either (Kruithof, 2008). Consequently many variations on these two main systems of childcare emerged throughout the twentieth century. The pavilion system appeared as one of the most noteworthy examples:

Il faut organiser des placements par petits groupes ou petites colonies de dix à douze enfants des deux sexes, sagement combinés et d'âge différent, de façon à constituer une famille artificielle où le rôle principal incombera à la femme qui sera non seulement la ménagère, mais surtout la mère de famille.[35]

During the Second International Congress on Child Welfare in 1921 Rouvry himself proposed this different approach and explicated the *pavillionair* method used in Mol, which could count on a lot of international attention and appreciation (Terryn, 2005).

Vael (1989) concludes that the failure of residential care and similarly the familial placement for that matter was at that time not attributed to the method of childcare as such, but rather attributed to the 'imperfections of the supporting structures'. In other words, these two out-of-home care systems were not fundamentally questioned. These two practices were for centuries and still are the dominant way of thinking out-of-home care. We determined that on the occasion of the renovation of the boys' (and girls') orphanage the method of childcare was thoroughly investigated in terms of 'material pros and cons'. Consequently, the function or role of these institutions in the broader social context was not questioned. In the next part we will elaborate on various educational principles central throughout this on-going discussion.

3.2.2 From an institution to a home: 'Creating a home away from home'

The discussions on the future of the Ghent orphanages can be situated in the midst of these (inter)national debates on out-of-home care. The arguments illustrate in fact more than a mere preference for an out-of-home care method for this particular group of children. The reflections shed light on the 'renewed' educational emphases and shifts within the vision of the Bureau of Social Welfare. In general, it was the clear ambition of the Bureau to move towards a more 'child centred' educational vision.

The changing educational ideas in order to meet the presumed needs of these homeless children are first apparent in the changing terminology used to describe the

35 'One must organize the placements in small groups or small colonies of ten or twelve children of both sexes, wisely combined and of different ages, in this way one forms an artificial family where the main role will be for the woman, who will not only be the housewife, but especially the mother of the family' Dupont-Bouchat, 2001.

children and the life within the institution. Clear examples of this are the altering terms for the children and staff. Where the records in the 1940s and 50s refer to them as supervisors and pupils, in the 60s and 70s they spoke of educators and residents. Next, the preference for small groups (community groups) was defended as an alternative to the previous barrack system. Discipline and order were the building stones of the antiquated educational project, whereas smaller groups should ensure a more modern educational approach.

The boys who are entrusted to us are not small adults, who should be drilled according to a military system. They are and remain children, with their own child's life that is radically different to the thoughts and actions of adults. Therefore, preference is given to the system of pavilions where smaller groups of children live in a healthy family spirit. However we want to add immediately that we will not be tempted by the system of 'family' that children of both ability and of varying ages bring together under the leadership of a 'mother' or an 'aunt'. Thus no co-education.[36]

Whereas the belief in small groups was widespread, the Bureau at the same time undoubtedly did not want to choose for a mixed education. After all, according to the Board these children lack the natural reluctance of consanguinity. They know and feel, so the bureau continues, that they are strangers to each other by birth, who are raised together by accidental circumstances. Such group, compared with those of siblings from a normal family, has a very different social and affective structure. In other residential homes, the children were simply split by gender at puberty but that was not an option either, since it was believed that the children would ask questions and even experience true soul conflicts regarding the separation. Following this idea the educational staff also remained separated by gender. Only the youngest boys, between 3 and 6 years old, had female and male educators.

In these debates the importance of domesticity and 'a healthy family atmosphere' was more and more emphasised during the 1950s and 60s. The conviction was that these changes would approach, but nevertheless not replace, the family life more than the old barrack system. This emerging idea was combined with an increased 'presence' of the original family in the lives of the children. Although the suspicion against the original families did not disappear, the Ghent authorities argued for an ever-increasing involvement of (approved) family members in the life of these institutionalised children. For example, the visiting regulations were extended[37] and it became possible to go 'on holiday' for a longer period of time at the parents' home or

36 006-02/1/2010/34 Correspondence related to the construction of the girls section of the home 'Prince Filip', 1952-1978.

37 From 1964 on it was possible for both boys and girls to receive visitors, or to go visit approved relatives on Sundays.

with other family members who had previously been granted permission. This relates to a broader ambition 'to improve the integration of the children in the Ghent society'. The clearest example is the abolition of the schools attached to the institution. The principals made a clear request in the 1950s to enroll the children in different schools in the city centre.

The Bureau of Social Welfare in Ghent described all the intended reforms in progressive, evolutionary and enhancive terms. By way of illustration, we cite the documents discussing the 'reconstruction of the home for orphan boys' in which reference is made by the commission to the 'educational reform' during the interwar period. They state that pedagogues developed and propagated all kinds of 'new' educational theories and systems thence there was never more spoken or written of 'the child' and huge sacrifices are made to let children take part in civilization. According to the Bureau, this urge to reform also echoed in the 'institution pedagogy', here too the old systems were renounced and new ones were experimented with. The document describes the 'ground principles' for the 'the construction of the "home", the training of personnel and the associated education methods'. From this reform period allegedly a new but lasting revival of institution pedagogy gradually developed and these are *'therefore the principles that serve as the base for the reconstruction of the "home for orphan boys" Ghent'*. The members of the Bureau renounced several 'old' educational principles and considered different ways to improve and modernise the educational project, which were discussed above. The records reveal a strong belief in the idea that this changing infrastructure would entail a different education and, subsequently, even would affect the behaviour of the children (Richardson, 2000). In other words, the new educational regime commences with and had to be achieved through the building of a new and modern institution for these 'social cases'.

However, the changes in the educational regime are to be situated on the surface due to the fact that the assumptions regarding the children, their parents and their future fundamentally remain the same. As we can read in the correspondence of the headmaster of the orphan girls on 29 October 1964 to the 'permanent bureau', elaborating on her educational vision:

"the formation of very different and not always easy to lead children (heredity - former influences and impressions - all kinds of unfavourable factors still affect the child) that are entrusted to them, need to be educated as versatile as possible. As a person and as a social being."[38]

38 006-02/1/2010/36 Rules of internal order of home Prince Philip and documents related to the daily schedules.

In the annual report of 1969, it is claimed: *'in general, we find that the backgrounds of the new recruited pupils are lower than before'*. Likewise the section on 'punishments' in the rule book, drawn up by the members of the Public Welfare Bureau in 1968, reflects a changed terminology but an unaltered idea: *'the child should not be punished in a fit of temper, but because it is needed in the best interest of the child. We will always make the child feel that we have their best interest at heart. This is preferably not put into words.'* Generally we can still consider the placement of the children as a social investigation with the attempt to ameliorate the broader society (Driver, 1987). As Kruithof (2008) states, even though 'discipline was replaced by behavioural science approaches' the optimistic ideas in the 1960s about the socially engineered society did not disappear but were translated into child protection by reinforcing the professional apparatus. The daily pedagogical regime and practices alter throughout time but the underlying and ultimate pedagogical 'reform' or 'manipulability' idea does not change. A strong desire to solve social problems by reforming individual families still underlies this call for change.

3.2.3 A new home: 'Prince Filip'

After years of discussing back and forth and several comparative studies, the construction of a brand-new institution was decided on and baptised 'Prince Filip'. Its construction started in 1957 and was completed in November 1962. Even though the official records speak of 'a home' instead of 'an orphanage' this new institute once again became better known as the orphanage of the city of Ghent. The children who were admitted after 1962 still addressed each other as orphans and today still refer to their stay in 'the orphanage' or '*the shed*'. In the end, the Bureau of Social Welfare in essence designated once more a so-called 'mastodon building', however with features of a pavilion system: *'The "Home for Orphans" to be built in Ghent, will also be based on the fundamental principles of the pavilion system. However, the system of small pavilions will not be applied, because of practical difficulties.'* This was a remarkable end conclusion since the government and prevailing educational ideas seem to support the more individual care of the pavilion system. The decisive arguments were of a more pragmatic nature, such as the estimated costs, the amount of staff and the most suitable location, but foremost because the common services such as the kitchen, laundry, gym and so on could be shared in this plan, which implied a firm reduction of the expenses.[39] In other words, a compromise between the financial feasibility and the pedagogical desirability was reached.

It is noteworthy however, that the reports and correspondence show that the Bureau of Social Welfare tried to support this final decision with pedagogical arguments. In

39 006-02/1/2010/34 Correspondence related to the construction of the girls section of the home 'Prince Filip'.1952-1978.

the correspondence, a study dating from 1957 executed by the 'Belgian federation of former orphans' is often cited. In this, a resolute choice in out-of-home care for this specific group of children was made. They decide on the path of collective care and abjure the method of familial placement:

"Also temporary placement in a related family or in a foster family is in our opinion a mistake. In our consideration the place of orphaned and neglected children over six years is in orphan homes, conceived according to our conception of a healthy moral in intimate group life, where friendly care excludes all sense of emptiness. Not that we want to argue that everything is perfect in all existing homes. However, it is possible, even in a community, to come close to the methods conscientious parents apply to raise their own children. An atmosphere of love and creating security is neither a paradox, nor impossibility."[40]

From 1978 onwards the discussions concerning the future of the institution arose again. This time, however, the very existence of the home was at stake. The Public Centre for Social Welfare established the study group 'youth' with a clear aim: *'formulating proposals for new destinations and reorganization of Prince Filip'*. Reorganizations followed each other at a rapid pace, which would announce the closure of the last Ghent orphan home in 1984, something the headmaster of the boys' division already foresaw in 1979. *'Is the whole reorganization maybe an avoidance manoeuvre or a distraction from the outside?'*[41], he asked the chairman of the Public Centre for Social Welfare. Why else would a report of the study group 'youth' state: '*as a general principle as few children as possible should be admitted in the home*'?[42]

3.3 Conclusion

The research topics of this chapter were the discussions, decisions and aspirations of the Bureau of Social Welfare regarding the policy of the Ghent orphanages. After deciding to build a brand-new institution for these 'homeless children', years of debate followed on the method of choice to take care of these children. By analysing the remaining records we gained insight into the evolving (educational) points of view of the various policy makers. A clear preference towards the pavilion system was expressed, as this method held the promise to make a more individual education, in a more homely atmosphere possible. A clear link between infrastructural improvements

40 006-02/1/2010/57 File related to the Royal League of former Orphan Boys Ghent, 1953-1978.
41 006-02/1/2010/3 Bundle of paper of the study group 'Youth' of the Bureau of Social Welfare (Ghent) that works around the reorganization of home 'Prince Filip'. 1979-1982.
42 Ibid.

and altering educational ideas was made, expecting that the construction of a new institution according to the modern (material) standards of that time would lead to a transformation in the daily life of the Ghent orphanage.

This renewed educational vision, often referred to as a more 'child and family centred' vision, aimed to abjure the old, rigid and disciplinary educational approach within the institutions. There have been for example changes in the terminology used to address the children and daily developing practices within the new and modern infrastructure. But then again, although some daily practices did disappear, were replaced or altered, the underlying pedagogical mission seemed to remain as it was: '*educating the children into useful members of society*'. These children considered to be at risk, had to be saved from their pernicious families in order to avoid future danger by reforming them. In essence the renewed orphanage remained a tool for monitoring, preservation and discipline of the children, their parents and in the end the population of the city of Ghent.

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Chapter 4

Remembering the Ghent Orphan Houses: a never ending contested space[43]

Abstract

Our study of the Ghent orphanages as a closed space initially led to a (re)construction of this particular educational site by contextualizing this setting in time and space. Through oral history research we found that the history of the Ghent orphan houses is still very much alive even though the last Ghent urban orphanage was closed in 1984. Now, the former orphans control and manage the passing on and remembrance of their history. This paper provides an insight into this process by analyzing two of these sites: a Facebook group and the former orphan league, identifying the contestation that arises in their quest for the truth and recognition about their 'mutual' past and the way(s) in which their histories should be remembered.

43 De Wilde, L. & Vanobbergen, B. (2015) Remembering the Ghent orphanages: A never-ending contested space. (Published) in *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth, 8*(1), 94-105.

4.1 The Ghent orphanages: a closed space and an open space

In the past decades a lot of international research has been done on residential institutions for children, often related to the topic of child poverty (Dekker, 1985; Hasci, 1997; Head-König, 2010; Tiffin, 1982). Cunningham (1991) analysed the changing images of the children of the poor since the seventeenth century in England and the rise of collective projects directed towards poor children Cooter (1992) edited a volume exploring many of the same themes, using the history of health as its lens. Dekker (2001) pointed to the growing will to change the child and explored how the re-education home as a new phenomenon arose in nineteenth century Europe. Of great importance in his analysis are the interconnections between religion, private philanthropy, the role of the government, child science and child welfare legislation. Orphanages have attracted the attention of Groenveld, Dekker & Willemse (1997) who described in a voluminous work six centuries of care in orphanages and children's homes in the Netherlands. Coldrey (2000) revealed an important field of tension in orphanages referring to the orphanage as a second chance and a refuge for some children while at the same time it was a place of terror and degradation for others.[44]

Histories of institutions often focus on a clearly defined period in time and space. Historians usually look at these institutions as finished projects attempting to (re)construct their history by contextualizing it against the background of a specific era. Through this perspective institutions are regarded as closed spaces, using 'closed' in terms of 'finished'. Our research project on the Ghent orphanages initially had a similar objective in mind focusing on the period from 1945, just after the Second World War to 1984.[i] During this time the boys orphanage joined with the orphanage for girls on the other side of the city, the endpoint of a history of the orphanages organized by the city of Ghent, which started centuries before in 1616 with the opening of 'the blue school' for orphan boys. This tradition of collective residential care came to a final end in 1984, when the last home 'Prince Filip' permanently closed its doors.

Our study draws on a wide examination of the records stored in the archives of the Public Centre for Social Welfare in Ghent and interviews conducted with both former

44 1234 children were enrolled in the Register of Ghent Orphans during the period 1945-1984, At that time (1952) there were around 110 children admitted. In the post-war period the majority of the parent(s) of these orphaned children were still alive at the time of their admission. Depending on the source of information (annual reports versus personal files of the children) the figures vary slightly, but overall we can state that after WWII more than 75% of the children still had at least one parent alive at the time they were admitted to a Ghent orphanage.

orphaned boys and girls.[45] In doing these interviews, it became clear that constructing the history of the Ghent orphanages is an ongoing process in which the former orphans play a crucial and central role. In this history their quest for 'the truth' and some kind of 'recognition' can be seen as a running thread. Still today a magazine on the history of the orphan houses is published on a regular basis, Facebook groups are created and exhibitions are put up. Consequently, instead of considering the Ghent orphanages as a finished project we foreground the idea of the Ghent orphan houses as an open space in this paper. Literally, one could say that these spaces can be viewed as battlefields where former orphans daily construct and reconstruct the histories of (their life in) the orphan houses.

By analysing the orphan houses from this perspective, we hope to gain new insights that can be of importance for the study of what is often called 'the politics of apology'. (Brooks, 1999; Cunningham, 1999; Gibney, 2008; Rushton, 2006; Thompson, 2002) Löfström (2011, p. 94) is one of many scholars who point to the *"expanding amount of literature on the issue of repairing historical injustices"* at the turn of the millennium. Today, in many countries around the globe such as The Netherlands, Denmark, Australia and Norway the history of youth care and residential institutions for children and young people is an object of research.[46] The starting point of this research often lies in signals and complaints about violence and (sexual) abuse made by former residents of these institutions. The research is then presented as a kind of 'truth commission' introducing 'recognition' and 'acknowledgement' as important concepts to deal with the truth in these different histories. Löfström (2011, p. 94) gives an overview of various models of explanation and concludes by highlighting *"one factor that almost all the analyses see as having conduced to the development is the increased political mobilization and visibility of minorities and oppressed groups wanting to have justice for their collective memories and experiences of the past."*

Ever since it became possible in the nineties for the former residents of the Ghent orphan houses to look into their personal file at the Public Centre for Social Welfare, and since the reformation of the ancient former orphan league and the rise of social media the memory of the Ghent orphanages became increasingly visible within the Ghent society. A respectable proportion of former orphans started to come together in different (sub)groups in order to firstly, express and share their 'own history', and secondly, claim their very existence, arguing that what happened in the Ghent orphanages should never be forgotten. During our interviews we came across several

45 Especially the personal files of every registered child, the annual reports of the Bureau of Social Welfare, the enrolment registers of the orphans but also numerous general policy documents such as correspondence, financial notes, staff log books, etc.

46 Examples of these studies: http://www.anbragtihistorien.dk/english/about-the-project.html, http://www.onderzoek-seksueel-kindermisbruik.nl/, http://forgottenaustralianshistory.gov.au/

of these sites of remembrance of which we chose two for our analysis: a Facebook group and the reformed orphan league.

This chapter illustrates primarily how and why we can consider the Ghent orphanages as an open space, elaborating on two chief sites in which the histories of the Ghent orphan houses live on. In the next phase of our analysis we point out the internal conflicting interests in these sites ensuring that their quest for the truth and recognition becomes a real struggle.

4.2 The orphanage as an open space

The term oral history in the context of our study asks for a brief explanation. In line with Bleyen's (2008) interpretation this concept refers in our research to a method or research process in which the researcher creates the oral sources and analyses them to obtain insights into processes of the past. Many historians of childhood nowadays use the memoirs of adults as an important source for their scientific research (Fass, 2010). In order to *"get a better history, a more critical history, a more conscious history which involves members of the public in the creation of their own history"* we also turned to the witnesses of this specific educational environment (Grele, 1985, p. 283). This recent belief in the oral history method derives from the conviction of today's historians of childhood that children often are the only witnesses to history and that we must rely on them if we are to remember and to grapple with the events of which they were part (Fass, 2010). In our study we strongly believe that these testimonies of former orphans can provide access to unique and specific information which other (written) sources or actors could not.

One of the essential findings from our oral history research is significant in the scope of this chapter. All of the individual testimonies regarding childhood in a Ghent orphan house revealed a certain presence of the past. *"It's true, the past is the past. But euhm I don't know… I still have to live with that past every day"* was often heard during the testimonies. In very different ways the respondents' time and experiences in the Ghent orphan houses still seem to play an important role in the daily life of the former orphans. Numerous examples illustrate that 'the Ghent orphanages' are not a closed chapter for them.

For instance one woman told us that she changes her briefs at least two times a day because while growing up in the orphan house her underpants were made of a thick material and changed only once a week. Several other participants stressed the strong

memory they have to their own number.[47] In consequence this still plays a prominent role in their daily lives: *"If I see or read number thirty-one, I automatically think of the orphanage. I always fill in this number on my lotto form, weird no?*" Or: *"I was number twenty. And that number still does something with me. Funny actually. If I used to get a market place I was pleased if number twenty was below my feet."* Many former orphans referred to one or other customs which, according to them are related to what they experienced in these institutions. For example: not wanting to kiss their children when it's new-year, never wanting to eat fish again or always drinking their coffee cold.

The construction of these narratives was always *"unique in that it creates its own documents, documents that are by definition explicit dialogues about the past, with the 'subject' necessarily triangulated between past experience and the present context of remembering"* (Frisch, 2010, p. 188). Nevertheless their unique and personal story was paramount in this study. As Bleyen (2008, p. 346) rightly suggests in his chapter on theoretical issues related to oral history*: "the interview is first an act of 'narration', then becomes a 'narrative' or text, and finally receives a place in a historical account or 'history'"*. We consider these testimonies as retrospective narratives of childhood. And although these narratives are not autobiographies according to the concise definition used by Douglas (2010, p.10) in her book *Contesting Childhood,* we come to a similar key conclusion that *"these autobiographies illustrate the particular spaces that have opened up for the expression of [shame] experienced in childhood."* Throughout these childhood narratives various examples of sites arose in which histories of the Ghent orphan houses were being constructed and reconstructed.

4.3 Facebook group and orphan leagure: an analysis

The two sites we have chosen to explore are both organised and maintained by the former orphans themselves. This implies that internal decisions determine who can and cannot participate and express themselves in these spaces. What is of a special interest is that these spaces are embedded within different social networks. Therefore if we speak of '(sub)groups' or members we refer to a specific group related to a specific practice. Not all of our participants are for instance a member of one or more Facebook groups. The same goes for the former orphan league membership. Some former residents of the Ghent orphanages participate in all these practices, others in

47 Each child was assigned a number on their first day. In addition to their first name, last name and in some cases their nickname, the children - especially in the old orphanages – were addressed with this number. In addition, the number system was primarily used to recognize the garments, since all the garments came together in the laundry system. The children themselves sewed in each pants, apron, handkerchief or underpants their own number.

some or none at all. Some even explicitly don't want to belong to any 'memorial' of their history.

Our data collection started by registration of the activities within these two groups. From 2011 we followed the numerous online and e-mail conversations, took part in gatherings, read the quarterly journal and noted the various formal and informal statements by both members and opponents of one or more associations. A qualitative content data analysis was applied to identify the ways in which the former orphans organize and express themselves in and with reference to these two sites (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This analysis allowed us to identify important common themes and patterns throughout the narratives.

4.3.1 Facebook groups

The first spaces we analysed were the different Facebook groups. There have been several groups, fan pages or blogs put up via social media during recent years. Some have already been deleted but others are still active, gathering more and more members. Amongst the Facebook groups there is a lot of discussion on who has 'the right' to create one and who can and cannot become a member. Because these are all 'closed groups', the founder(s) who are all former orphaned children, have to grant permission to the new members who want to join. *"I got a request from XXX to become a member. But sorry folks, I really do not feel like it anymore!!! We now have a nice and quiet group and I want absolutely no hassle or discussions ... so no. We all know that it will go wrong again! I want to keep it calm and kind here."*[48]

These discussions occur especially between the orphans of the 'old' and the 'new' orphanages. The former consider themselves 'real' orphans and argue that the latter would have had a much easier time and therefore are not considered genuine orphans or *kulders.*[49] The 'old' orphanages refer to the two orphanages remaining in 1945 organized by the Bureau of Social Welfare.[50] One for the orphan boys in the Martelaarslaan (1873-1962) and on the other side of the city in the Rodelijvekensstraat (1751-1962) and the one institution for the girls.[51] These

48 Facebook group 'Blue girls and Kulders'. October 24, 2013

49 49 The orphan boys thanked the name 'kulder' to their dress code dating from the seventeenth century. They had to wear a typical type of garment called a 'kolder', which was a type of dress-like piece in a nude colour covering breast and back and was assembled at their necks. Above this 'kolder', they wore a blue sleeveless robe.

50 By the law of March 10, 1925 the Commission of Civil Hospices was replaced by the Bureau of Social Welfare (COO). However, the law retained the distinction between the categories and the interpretation of orphans, foundlings and abandoned children, as described in the imperial decree of January 18, 1811. Still in charge of the dual task: providing and educating.

51 The Saint-Josefschool for poor girls was located by the Nederkouter. The girls that lived here were called 'de rode lijvekens' because they were dressed in a long blue skirt and a red top. In 1751 the orphanage moved to the 'rue des Filles-Dieu'. Today this street is officially called the 'Rodelijvekensstraat'.

orphanages were run completely separately from each other, in their part of town. On November 5, 1962 all boys and girls moved to the 'new' orphan house, called Prince Filip in the Jubileumlaan (1962 -1984). Even though there was just one urban orphan house left for the boys and girls, they still lived in separate wings and this would remain so until the closure in 1984.

One of the largest facebook groups, fifty-five members at this point in time, is called 'Blue girls and Kulders'.[52] The members are both male and female and stayed in one of the three Ghent orphanages after World War II. The member description reads: *"Anyone who was ever a blue girl or a kulder in Ghent Rodelijvekensstraat or Prince Fillip Jubileumlaan Ghent, we love to hear from you and see you again!!!!!"*. This specific facebook group was founded by a woman who stayed in Prince Filip during the 60s and 70s. The foundress considers her childhood as the best years of her life and is extremely positive about growing up in Prince Filip. As a result her enthusiasm and view on the matter clashes on a regular basis with those who mostly have negative memories about their time in these institutions.

Recently she launched the idea to bring together some of the women to visit the headmistress on the occasion of her birthday. This led to ferocious reactions and the idea did not proceed. The responses were similar when one member anonymously posted a picture of the headmistress.[53] Nobody admitted to posting it and the accusations were directed at the foundress, who denied this suggestion and expressed her disappointment and sadness on the matter. The picture disappeared and the discussion ended. There are many such conversations which discuss what is or is not acceptable to post or say in the group, fearing that some people might resent the subject or be offended by certain posts.

This group fulfils several functions. One of the activities is sharing memories, by posting old photos and sharing anecdotes or stories. One former orphan wrote about the day she arrived in the Rodelijvekensstraat, on her birthday in 1958. A female educator with a grey bun was waiting by the entrance door with a large bunch of keys in her hands. The members also use this group to invite fellow former orphans to birthday parties or small reunions, to track down other former orphans and to share important, difficult or memorable events in their lives via photos or text posts.

52 From November 1623 the Ghent orphan girls could find shelter in a second orphanage for girls: the blue Meyskensschool. This building, a former leprosarium, was located in the Onderstraat. The blue girls ascribe their name to the typical costume which consisted of a long blue skirt topped by a blue sweater. The life of these orphan girls was completely devoted to crafts. In 1864 the blue girls also moved to the orphanage in the Rodelijvekensstraat but their name remained.
53 Facebook group 'Blue girls and Kulders'. May 31, 2013.

The groups also provide a space in which members can express various frustrations. One former orphan boy posted a picture of the holiday house 'young and happy' by the sea.[54] Immediately a lot of reactions followed. One of the members posted the story of a female educator who, just after arriving in the villa ripped their posters from the wall. This contribution led to various tough reactions, stating that *"that piece of trash"* or *"poisonous snake"* even enjoyed it, but eventually got what she deserved by dying. These frustrations are not only about the past but just as much about the present. One of the former orphan girls posted for example: *"My mother is coming soon to eat as much as she wants, all for free; I better start cooking I presume?? But she doesn't have to count on much … and a glass of water to go with it…!!!!!"* This was followed by a quick response: *"Just give her a sandwich, tell her you didn't have much more growing up."*[55] A few days later another member of the group came across an old advertisement of a toothpaste brand and subsequently posted the photo on this page, mentioning that this was what they got in the orphanage, *"just cheap crap, because it was just for the orphans"*. The members of this group commonly address each other as *orphans* and at times as brothers and sisters, positioning themselves as one big family obligated to take care of one another.

4.3.2 Former orphan leagues

According to the book *Kulders blood and blue girls tears* (De Bleecker, 2010) the first association was founded by former orphans as early as 1846.[56] Those who left the *kulderschool* and were in need of support in hard times could call on 'brotherly love and assistance' through this association which is considered as the origin of the 'League for Ghent former orphan boys' founded in 1893. This union, exclusively for men, aimed to "maintain and strengthen the unity between the former orphan pupils" after leaving the orphanage. It survived for several decades under the chairmanship of the boys' orphanage headmaster. In 1951, the then Headmaster, De Schrijver ruled that this union should be led by an orphan boy and selected Maurice D'Hont for the role. Thirty years ago he handed over the torch to Jan Willaert, who remains the president of the overarching association.

In 1985 two former orphan boys, dissatisfied with this association, founded a new organisation called 'the circle of friends' with the intention of uniting as many former orphans as possible, young or old, men or women. More than a decade later both leagues combined, mainly due to the decreasing membership of the old league. Since 1998 the organisation has been known as the 'Royal association of the former orphans of Ghent'. According to the secretary the objective is no longer to support

54 Facebook group 'Blue girls and Kulders'. October 5, 2013.
55 Facebook group 'Blue girls and Kulders', October 2013, post already deleted.
56 Writing by a former orphan boy F. M. De Bleecker and self-released, Belgium: Drongen, 2010

each other, but to keep the memory of the rich history of the Ghent orphans alive. However, the exact goal or function of this organisation is a constant subject of debate. In June 2012 we received an e-mail from a former orphan boy, directed to various former orphans and chairman of the league, Jan Willaert denouncing the current policy of the association: *"Another thing that I find the league failing in, your predecessor Mr D'hont supported and went to visit hospitalized people with serious diseases. […] Orphan girls and boys, I will continue to visit and give them support. Normally this is the task of the orphan league and the chairman to support our orphan boys and girls!! It's not only a matter of selling membership cards and then not care anymore, followed by bragging about how many members you have."* The e-mail concluded by expressing the hope that the president would change course. We never noticed any response.

These discussions occur amongst the members rather than between the board members. Besides a chairman, the board of the former orphan league consists of a vice-chairman and a secretary who also takes on the editorial duties. These days the organisation has approximately a hundred and fifty members and primarily organises an annual reunion, publishes books on the long history of the orphan houses, puts up exhibitions such as 'Colourfully dressed in red and blue' on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the association and issues a quarterly journal aptly named '*The orphan – info'*, with several regular features, such as: the obituary, information about the society, general history of the city of Ghent and more specifically of the Ghent orphanages, member contributions and so on. [57]

4.4 The orphanages as an open and contested space

Although we encountered no difficulties in finding former orphans willing to tell their story about their time in the Ghent orphanages, it is important to indicate that a large proportion of these past residents are present only in their absence. These silent voices opt for different reasons for a more 'anonymous' life and would rather not be associated with their past. Others choose very consciously to become involved in one way or another. All of them have at least one thing in common: spent time in a Ghent orphan house for a considerable period of time. The two main motivations for the former orphans to bring together their stories are a quest for the truth and a quest for recognition.

Many reactions and comments reveal the importance of this quest for the truth, telling their individual story on the Ghent orphanages. During the interviews it rapidly

57 This journal was called *Our work* from 1927 to 1982.

became clear that the former orphans are in great need of affirmation. They asked several times to confirm their story or they underlined the fact that they could not be lying by pointing out the 'proofs' and they repeatedly asked if I had heard this before. Regularly these men and women hesitated before commencing on a story, wondering if they would be able to tell 'the truth'. This was particularly the case in reference to the so-called dreadful conduct of the educators, principals and guardians where many of the participants needed reassurance before proceeding. For example when a former orphan girl wanted to report on the sexual transgressive behaviour of the female educators she asked *"I shouldn't talk about the misses I presume?"*

In sharing their childhood experiences a second drive became clear, namely a call for recognition. During the interviews many of these men and women mentioned *"Nobody knows anymore"*, pointing out that people today have no idea about what they had to endure in the Ghent orphanages all those years ago. In the first instance, this quest for recognitions entails just this: an acknowledgment of their existence, of their history. Several suggestions were made as to how this could be achieved, for example a memorial plaque, a statue, a permanent exhibition and so on. But, in addition strong desires to punish educators or board members were declared as well.

Despite getting 'acknowledgement for their true story' through this bonding and sharing process a lot of internal discussions and quarrels occur amongst the members. In general the debates embody the possible function(s) these spaces should have or not have. The views differ to a great extent. According to some the emphasis should be on helping former orphans in need, financially by collecting money, materially by providing shelter for (temporally) homeless or mentally by for example visiting the hospitalised. Another group views these sites as meeting spaces with the primary function of sharing their past and present experiences. An additional use of these sites is as opportunities to denounce past events. Last but not least, a significant group of former orphans considers these channels as a means of displaying the memories of the Ghent orphanages.

More specifically the arguments focus on the topics of conversation, the history of the Ghent orphanages as such, the membership, their experiences, and so on. By sharing their individual narratives of childhood, the former orphans come into contact with one another. Their memory is shared, transmitted, expressed, in various and complicated ways within these sites and becomes both an individual and a collective possession. In this process it becomes clear that not all the storylines match. Former residents argue about whether or not they got candy and presents for Christmas or which educator was 'the worst'. As a result conflicts arise on a regular basis. The many (online) reactions and discussions following various published online posts, photos and articles during the last years demonstrate how the memories of the Ghent orphanages continue to be sites of contestation. This contest is often a struggle in the terrain of truth as Hodgkin rightly points out (in Hodgkin & Radstone, 2006, p. 1). The

disagreements among the former orphaned children are actually a matter of conflict over the representations of their 'mutual' past.

This quest for the truth and recognition becomes in this way a real struggle for the former orphans. This struggle seems to have accelerated during recent years or at least become more public under the influence of social media. As Douglas (2010, p. 2) has argued in relation to young people, our analysis shows that for former orphans: *"These online declarations of social life, tastes and accomplishments have allowed […them] to exert greater control over cultural representations"* of their past. In the latest edition of *The Orphan - info* the secretary reacts to what he describes as the recent 'bullshit' on the internet and on Facebook, in particular the speculations about the sterilisation of boys with low IQs during the nineteen fifties which, he argues, are a bridge too far: *"although there have always been comments, often from the same persons, about the bad conditions in the kulderschool, and they usually write without naming names and perhaps without any proof, but what was said last month goes too far. [...] One can read in this issue and next editions of the journal parts of a University thesis [...] with the hope that our facebook reporters will look at it a little bit different. None of our older kulders made a drama of their poor young life, knowing that it will yield nothing. One makes himself the brunt. And if one didn't know: all the culprits are long dead. One can cry out as loudly as possible, they will not hear it anyway."* Signed F. M. De Bleecker, also known as *kulder* number 37.

This struggle embodies a disagreement and conflict about 'how it was' and how the Ghent orphanages should be remembered. These conflicts often lead to a falling out of contact, (re)connecting with others, leaving the former orphan league, no longer wanting to come to reunions or even demanding a different chairman. Despite the common theme that brings these people together, the encounters are for the most part characterized by 'differences' rather than similarities. We can expect these differences between the various individual stories because following Portelli (2006, pp.)*"we should read these memories as narratives of meaning rather than event".*

4.5 Conclusion

Our initial research of the Ghent orphanages after the Second World War did not have the intention of investigating the pure historical facts. Consequently any truth related judgements are not part of our study. Unlike other research on the history of residential institutions for children that do seem to cherish this ambition within a so-called politics of apology logic, we primarily focussed on gaining insight into the meaning of growing up in this specific educational site. Through the oral history part of our research design, we were faced with a lot of new research questions initiated by our participants. This contribution elaborated on the strength of their childhood

memories about the Ghent orphanages on a daily basis, evident in their regular references to the media attention and different investigations on the history of other institutions for 'homeless children'. This study has taught us that histories of institutions are not always a closed chapter. More than twenty-five years after the last urban orphan house closed its doors, (the history of) these institutions takes multiple different shapes through various channels and groupings. In this context recognition is something different from determining and distinguishing 'the truth'. This reading of historical research embodies the possibility of diversity and goes beyond the facts. In that way the research has given us the opportunity to reflect and break open some pervasive concepts within the logic of the politics of apology.

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Chapter 5

Challenging the normative truth logic in the politics of apology: a quest for social justice[58]

Abstract

In recent years the (sexual) abuse perpetrated against children in the past has increasingly been perceived as a public concern and has become a political priority in many countries. In the context of this European and even global development, several formal inquiries commissioned by (national) authorities into the alleged historical abuse of children in public services were set up. As an attempt to come to terms with the failure of social welfare policies in a painful past and to repair human injustices, the number of apologies since the turn of the twenty-first century, in the quest for giving recognition to the victims of abuse, has continued to increase. In this chapter, we analyse and critique the underlying 'truth logic' of public apologies offered by the state in their quest for social justice, and tease out whether historical researchers, as being authorised by the state, should reproduce or challenge this logic.

58 De Wilde, L., Roets, G., & Vanobbergen, B. (Submitted). Challenging the normative truth logic in the politics of apology: a quest for social justice. Critical Social Policy.

5.1 Prologue

> *"Take for instance the case of the Brothers, it happened, it happened, it happened to us too. Why can they [the victims of sexual abuse by members of the Catholic Church in Belgium] tell their story while we cannot? And why do we have to keep silent about what happened to us as a child? Our youth has been destroyed too…"*

During the last decades of the 20th century, the (sexual) abuse perpetrated against children in the past was increasingly perceived as a public concern and has become a political priority in many countries (Corby, 2006; Sköld, 2013; Smart, 2000). In the context of this European and even global development, several formal inquiries commissioned by (national) authorities into the alleged historical abuse of children in public services were set up in the 1980s and 1990s, for example, in the USA, England and Wales, Northern Ireland, Canada and Australia (Corby, Doig & Roberts, 2001; Daly, 2014). These public inquiries often result from the complaints and accusations about maltreatment, violence, and (sexual) abuse made by former residents of public as well as private welfare institutions, and contain important messages for critical social policy analysis in discussing the responsibility of the state as related to, for example, the responsibility and liability of the Church (Ferguson, 2007; Garrett, 2010; Smart, 2000).

In that vein, the quote that serves as an eye opener for our contribution embodies the quest for social justice of a former orphan participating in our oral history research, which focuses on uncovering the history of the orphanages in Ghent (a city in Flanders, the Dutch speaking part of Belgium). The sharp critique raised by this former orphan refers to 'Operatie Kelk' (Operation Cup of Sorrow), a criminal justice inquiry into historical abuse of children by members of the Catholic Church in Belgium. At the time of our interviews with former orphans, an attempt was made by the Belgian Court of Justice to obtain the files and testimonies of the victims of abuse. This criminal justice inquiry, only recently finished in 2014, aimed to ascertain whether religious leaders of the Belgian Catholic Church were liable to punishment for their attempts to sweep the sexual abuse of children by religious persons in positions of trust under the carpet (The Editorial Office, 2014). In 2013, a panel of experts was subsequently commissioned by the Flemish Minister of Welfare, Public Health and Family Affairs, Jo Vandeurzen, to investigate the alleged historical abuse of children in publicly funded welfare and educational institutions (see Final Report *An unambiguous choice for recognition: historical violence and abuse in child welfare and educational public services in Flanders*, 2013). On the 22nd of April 2014, the Flemish Parliament finally issued a formal apology, addressing all the victims of historical

violence and abuse in Flemish child welfare and educational institutions in the period from 1930 to 1990. In an open letter, the Flemish Parliament publicly announced:

"The proven physical, psychological and sexual violence towards children and youngsters in child welfare and educational institutions in the period from 1930 to 1990 upsets the Flemish Parliament greatly.

All the stories of people, who plucked up their courage to uncover their experiences, clearly prove that key figures in child welfare and educational institutions were involved in unacceptable behaviour and have used violence in unnecessary ways. The Flemish Parliament deplores that those who were left in the care of an institution or boarding school, being in need of child protection, have become the victims of violence and abuse. (…)

For that reason, the Flemish Parliament wants to explicitly issue an apology for these unacceptable practices. As such, the Flemish Parliament wishes to recognise the experienced distress formally."

(Open Letter of the Flemish Parliament, April 22 2014).

Furthermore, the Flemish Parliament also expressed its well-intended aim to *"prevent, and if necessary proceed against, violence and abuse with respect to children and youngsters"* (Open Letter of the Flemish Parliament, April 22 2014). This public apology and stated intention clearly received an upsurge of public interest, as reflected in many Belgian newspapers and media. In estimating the symbolic value of the Open Letter, The News Magazine wrote that the Open Letter, as a strong sign for many citizens, *"will go down in history, being granted a manifest place in the Flemish Parliament"* (The Newspaper, 22 April 2014).

5.2 The underlying logic of public apologies

In his extensive work, When saying sorry isn't enough, Brooks (1999) announced that we have entered into an 'age of apology'. All over the world, political and religious leaders had begun to express official apologies for historical injustices in their notorious pasts (Bevernage, 2007; Cunningham, 1999). As an attempt to come to terms with the failure of social welfare policies in a painful past and to repair human injustices, the number of apologies in the quest for giving recognition to the victims of abuse has continued to increase since the turn of the century (Gibney, 2008). As such, the politics of apology, and particularly those apologies following on (national) inquiries into historical abuse, found a way into the political agendas of many countries (Daly, 2014). Nonetheless, in a previous issue of Critical Social Policy, P.M. Garrett (2010) criticises the ways in which a public apology for the suffering of

historical abuse of children can be raised on behalf of the state. His sharp critiques concentrate on issues such as the responsibility and liability of the state, and the continuities between historical and contemporary practices, while asserting pertinently that the Irish welfare state *"continues to fail to undertake adequate protection to children in 'care' or who are vulnerable in other ways"* (Garrett, 2010, p. 304).

In this chapter, we also want to question the underlying logic of public apologies that are made on behalf of welfare states, yet we do so from the point of view of historical researchers. Interestingly, the widespread response by authorities entails the appointment of research commissions or expert panels, who are engaging in an inquiry that deals with uncovering potentially abusive practices in state welfare institutions for children in the past, and with adult care leavers seeking recognition and redress in the present (Daly, 2014). In essence, the underlying public demand and provocation for these national inquiries usually implies a *"need to know the truth"* (Daly, 2014, p. 11). Research into historical abuse is predominantly approached by governments as something that needs to uncover 'the truth', as this truth functions as the basis for the politics of apology in the quest of giving recognition to the victims of abuse. Hence, these inquiries are established to satisfy this public concern and researchers engage in an exploration of oral, and in some cases written, testimonies in their aspirations to reveal 'what really happened' (Hodgkin, 2005). As many reports of national inquiries reflect, these researchers or experts are also assigned the mandate to elaborate and underpin the conclusions and policy recommendations.

In this way, historical research intrinsically becomes part of a political agenda and can therefore never be neutral (Löfström, 2011; Vansina, 2006). Despite the quite recent interest of researchers in the politics of apology, we argue that little attention has been paid to the role of historical research. As researchers working in a tradition of research in the history of education (Cooter, 1992; Dekker 2001; Dekker, Kruithof,Simon & Vanobbergen, 2012; Mayer, Lohmann & Grosvenor, 2009; Vanobbergen, 2011), however, we are confronted with the complexity of researching the historical dimension of welfare state arrangements. In our research, we studied the history of the three remaining orphanages in the city of Ghent by drawing on extensive qualitative in-depth interviews conducted with 40 formerly orphaned children and five ex-staff members. All the interviewees lived or worked in a Ghent orphanage during the period 1945 to 1984, the year in which the last Ghent orphanage irrevocably closed its doors. Here our analysis is based on an overview of relevant research literature, the large variety of reports of (national) inquiries into historical abuse, and our experiences of the complexities emerging during our own oral history research about the Ghent orphanages (See De Wilde & Vanobbergen, 2015).

In what follows, we analyse and critique the underlying 'truth logic' of public apologies offered by the state in their quest for social justice, and tease out whether historical researchers, who are authorised by the state, should reproduce or challenge this logic. In the first part of the chapter, we sketch the origins of the politics of apology, and in particular focus on the features of (national) inquiries concentrating on the alleged historical abuse of children in out-of-home care. Second, we explore the scope of the central notion of giving recognition to the former victims of abuse, and address that public apologies often pursue the intent to make up for the past. Third, we radically question the normative 'truth logic' within the politics of apology, and raise two major critiques from the viewpoint of historical researchers. Fourth, we attempt to reorient the finality of the quest for recognition that is pursued by governmental authorities while addressing public apologies. Inspired by philosophers in the theory of history, we explore the relevance of 'the presence paradigm' to rethink the relation between the past and the present, which leads us to the issue of continuity and discontinuity (Bos, 2010; Garrett, 2010). This frame of reference reveals how the past can be still relevant for contemporary research, policy and practice. In the concluding reflections, we argue that the 'presence paradigm' can enable historical researchers and contemporary policy makers to embrace continuities and discontinuities between historical practices and contemporary welfare state arrangements.

5.3 The politics of apology: setting the scene

We live in a day and age that seeks to establish political truth, exemplified by official, public apologies in the Western world. Framed within the context of the memory of the Holocaust (Bos, 2010), dealing with a painful (national) past became a high priority for many political agendas in the Western world as well. As it became clear during the Nazi war crime trials just after WWII that the traditional legal system was lacking, the quest for alternative forms of justice began. Post-war Germany became a model for the international community as it successfully dealt with past wrongdoings (Brooks, 1999). In the aftermath of the war, many other nation states in the West became convinced about *"the idea that societies should redress injustices committed long ago"* (Wyman, 2008, p. 128). All over the world, previously oppressed groups *"began to assert their rights and demand acknowledgement of, and apology for, their past mistreatment"* (Gibney, 2008, p. 3). Löfström (2011, p. 94) describes this apology trend as an "increased political mobilization and visibility of minorities and oppressed groups wanting to have justice to their collective memories and experiences of the past". These developments resulted in previously 'voiceless' groups demanding attention for those who suffered from violence and inequality (Gibney, 2008). As Bevernage (2007, p. 184) asserts, *"policymakers truly feel the hot breath of the past in*

their neck as civil society forces them to make an official apology, give symbolic or less symbolic reparation fees or establish truth commissions".

As a result, by the end of the twentieth century giving an official apology for historical injustice as a way to acknowledge the suffering of various groups of victims had clearly become a widespread practice. It is important to realise that these inquiries into historical abuse are part of the so-called current memory discourse (Sköld, 2013). These inquiries are primarily based on (oral) testimonies and promote the exploration and manifestation of memory as an alternative form of justice (Bevernage, 2007). They seem to offer a way of seeking social justice by offering a compromise between forgiveness or punishment and forgetting or remembering (Bevernage, 2007). Thus, these inquiries do not seek to sentence or punish the perpetrators, but offer an official and public 'truth telling' about historical injustice beyond forgiveness (Bevernage, 2010).

Since children are one of the pre-eminently former voiceless or invisible groups (Gibney, 2008), in this contribution we explore a variety of (national) inquiries concentrated on the alleged historical abuse of children in out-of-home care that are commissioned by governmental authorities and usually provoke responses in the form of an official public apology. In the past decades numerous countries such as Australia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Scotland, Poland, Sweden and Belgium instigated such an inquiry. For instance, in Australia a research on the so-called 'forgotten Australians' was commissioned in 2008 to support survivors of childhood institutional care. In Ireland, the 'Ryan commission', previously known as 'the Laffoy Commission', published the 'Ryan Report' in 2009 after investigating historical child abuse for ten years. A year later, the Swedish Ministry of Social Affairs published a report based on interviews with 400 former inhabitants of orphanages and foster homes with the aim to inform the public about mistreatment, physical, psychological cruelty and sexual abuse in the child welfare system in the 20th century. In Denmark, 'the Godhavn inquiry' examined child abuse and neglect in institutions or children's homes and its results first appeared in 2011. In The Netherlands, a report entitled *Surrounded by care, but still not safe. Sexual abuse of children placed in care by the government, 1945 to the present* was based on a two year research project and published in 2012.

Although these inquiries have inspired one another across different countries, they differ to some extent as well (Sköld, 2013). Notably, not all these inquiries are organised nationwide. In Australia and Norway, for example, different regions executed their own investigation, while in several countries the (Catholic) church set up their own research commissions. Furthermore, the (national) political and cultural context amongst the countries obviously differs too. 'Physical abuse', for example, isn't historically understood or statutory anchored in the same way in every country. The research scope varies as well. In some inquiries, the focus lies solely on

institutional cases such as in Flanders or Ireland. In countries like Australia and Sweden, however, the range entails investigations of foster care placements as well. In addition, the kind of abuse that is under scrutiny diverges too. In The Netherlands and Germany, for example, the focus lies exclusively on sexual abuse whereas in Belgium and Ireland physical and emotional abuse is also investigated. Last but not least, the data collection varies to that extent that, although a combination of research methods is implemented, some countries conducted interviews or held (public) hearings, while others set up a hotline or collected written contributions. In the next section, we explore the intent of giving recognition to the former victims of abuse, which is central to all these inquiries.

5.4 A quest for recognition: making up for the past

In her overview article on historical abuse, Sköld (2013, p. 6) ascertains that *"the many quotes of the different inquiries illustrate that the content of such investigations is based on compilations of traumatic memories and the informants descriptions of abuse in different countries have a great deal in common"*. As a universal appeal appearing in different inquiries, the gathered testimonies make record of the need for recognition. In the Flemish report composed by the expert panel (FR, 2013, p. 38), for example, 'recognition' is identified as *"what the victims are in need of the most"*. The Australian report connects the need for recognition to the notion of responsibility: *"responsibility for past abuse and neglect and the development of measures of reparations go to the heart of the concerns of victims of institutional abuse"* (FAR, 2004, p. 171). In Ireland, the report of the Laffoy commission states in this regard: *"It is important for the alleviation of the effects of childhood abuse that the State's formal recognition of the abuse that occurred and the suffering of the victims should be preserved in a permanent place"* (Implementation plan, 2009, p. 22). The prevailing contemporary way to recognise or acknowledge historical abuse of any kind principally gets shape through an apology. We can distinguish two types of apology within the inquiries: an official, public apology and a personal, individual apology. In their attempt to meet the demand for recognition, the dominant approach of Western welfare states to act upon results and recommendations of the research commission entails the enouncement of a public apology. It is this kind of apology that will be object of further analysis.

As our analysis of the literature and the various reports of (national) inquiries into historical abuse show, many different interpretations and conceptions of 'apologies' circulate today. Much has to do with the lack of a consistent definition of the significance, procedure and content of an official apology. Moreover, this practice is relatively new and under-exposed in scientific research. As Gibney (2008, p. 31) puts it:

"there is no agreement on what a political apology means, whether it is meaningful at all, when it should be offered, whether it is possible or appropriate to apologize for injustice of the more distant past, whether offering political apologies is an adequate way of dealing with injustices, and what relation they have to reparative justice".

As a result, the majority of the theoretical definitions primarily focus on what an apology may possibly consist of:

"An apology can acknowledge that an injury or damage has occurred. It may include acceptance of responsibility for the mistake; recognize regret, humility or remorse in the language one chooses; explain the role one has played; ask for forgiveness; include a credible commitment to change or promise that the act will not occur again; and often, tender some form of restitution or compensation" (Stamato, 2008, p. 389)

Based on Barkan's (2003) definition of an apology, Löfström (2011, p. 94) puts a refined description forward that describes what 'apologising' is all about in the context of coming to terms with the past: *"it is a process where the claimants demand recognition of the experiences and memories of loss and pain that are formative of their collective identity and their 'own history'"*. Here it is highlighted that apologising is actually a process-based practice, with a clear ambition to give recognition both on a collective as well as on an individual level (see also Smart, 2000).

In line with the reports of formal inquiries, 'acknowledgement' or 'recognition' is identified in the literature as the key component within the 'politics of apology'. In order to give recognition, it is argued that issuing a public apology implies a great deal:

"to acknowledge the act is to admit to failed performance or behaviour, to affirmatively indicate that a wrong was done; it requires that truth be told, neither minimizing the offense nor rationalizing the behaviour. In this burden lies the full force of an apology" (Stamato, 2008, p. 394).

How the giving of recognition can be realised in an attempt to make up for the past is debatable, yet it seems to imply that 'truth has to be told'. In the next section, the normative 'truth logic' within the politics of apology is questioned, and two major critiques are raised.

5.5 Questioning the normative 'truth logic' of the politics of apology

To figure out this truth-related question ('what did really happen?'), researchers often exclusively turn to the memory of former residents of welfare state institutions. In that vein, many scholars assert that memories of traumatic experiences are perceived as carriers of the truth about the past (see Sköld, 2013). The authorised researchers seem to build upon the assumption that it is possible to evaluate the past in an objective and neutral manner, because they are required by policy makers to determine a consensus about what 'really happened' to former residents within a specific institution. If this is the case, the making of an official apology by policy makers is in place (Bevernage, 2007). In some cases, paying the victim a compensation amount of money, or symbolic 'reparation fee', also materialises the act of recognition (Bevernage, 2007). This materialisation often requires a second kind of objective evaluation, with reference to the question of the gravity of abuse and violence at stake, and sometimes results in the creation of a form of hierarchy within the different forms of historical (sexual) abuse. In several countries, this results in a table draft that weighs the severity of abuse and categorises the compensation payments. This is, for example, the case in the inquiry in Ireland with regards to victims of abuse in residential institutions in Ireland who now reside in Australia (Towards redress and recovery report commissioned by the Minister of Education and Science, 2001. January 2002: vii).

Redress Band	Total Weightings for Severity of Abuse and Injury/Effects of Abuse	Award Payable by way of Redress	Number	Percentage
V	70 or more	€ 200 000 - € 300 000	6	1,12
IV	55-69	€ 150 000 - € 200 000	19	3,55
III	40-54	€ 100 000 - € 150 000	101	18,88
II	25-39	€ 50 000 - € 100 000	325	60,75
I	Less than 25	Up to € 50 000	84	15,70
Total			**535**	**100,00**

Table 4: Compensation Payments

In our view, this worldwide celebration of the truth, as Bevernage (2011) calls it, is no more than an illusion because the inquiries into historical abuse undoubtedly hold a strong normative perspective. The authorised researchers do not reveal 'the truth', but only 'a truth', uncovering storied versions of realities evolving in the past. As Löfström (2011, p. 105.) clarifies in this respect:

"official apologies by state institutions enunciate a normative view on whose memory and interpretation of the past are to be endorsed, and I believe that often it can be also well justified with historical argumentation. These apologies are also, as politics of history, normative statements on what should be incorporated in the shared memory and shared historical identity of the decent, responsible citizens' community that stands behind the speech act of apology".

Furthermore, Löfström states that the determination of 'the truth' is essentially a construction process of 'the story', driven by a search for 'shared narratives' (Barkan, 2009). This process ultimately leads to the creation of *"a certain discourse of history"* (Bevernage, 2010, p. 113). In the process of determining a common historical narrative, ambiguities and contradictions in the accounts of the so-called victims of abuse are filtered out in order to reach a consensus of 'what really happened'. In constructing one 'common historical narrative', we argue that two questionable

underlying dynamics come to the fore: a victimisation process and a criminalisation process.

5.5.1 Victimisation

Our first critique implies a process of victimisation that is potentially produced by historical researchers, which needs to be subject to critical scrutiny.The inquiries construct to some extent, in the words of Daly (2014, p. 10), *"a collective victimization story".* This is reflected in the labeling of the group of claimants in the international inquiry reports. In the Flemish (FR, 2013) and Dutch (DR, 2012) reports, for example, reference is predominantly made to the group under examination as 'victims'. In our own research, nevertheless, the former orphans did not by definition refer to themselves as victims. The labelling of 'these claimants' is an ambiguous and complicated issue since the former orphans ascribed different roles and identities to themselves. Roughly, three different roles can be distinguished. The first role actually refers to being a 'victim'. However this is not related to what happened within the orphanage, but to the fact that they were ever labelled as an orphan when they were admitted to the orphanage as a result of their familial circumstances. As one of the former orphans expressed:

> *"Of course, as a child, you are the victim. It was actually my mother who had quarrels with my father, but we were the victims. […] Come on, it wasn't our fault that we were placed there. We have been ashamed and casted out. […] I'm beginning to realise that we are the victims. They always made that very clear at Prince Filip [Ghent orphanage 1962-1984], we were nothing, so they told us that we should be very happy to be there because neither our mother nor father wanted us."*

Nevertheless, the majority of our respondents abjured the idea of being a victim, because they refused to be seen as a passive actor in their life story rather than softening and not denouncing certain practices or experiences. This concern is clearly represented in the second role they attribute to themselves, that of 'survivor'. The majority of former orphans feel a sense of pride since they managed 'to endure' their time in the Ghent orphanage. The idea of being a survivor can also be found in other national reports. The Australian report, for example, mainly applies the notion of 'care leavers' while the 'Alliance for forgotten Australians' refers to them consistently as 'survivors'. This is in line with the Irish report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (2009), which speaks of them as 'adult survivors of institutional abuse'. The third role by which the former orphans identify themselves is defined as the 'conqueror', which refers mainly to the period after their stay in the orphanage. It concentrates on what they have achieved 'despite of' or 'thanks to' the orphanage. In this respect, nonetheless, it is essential to address that a large number of former

residents are absent in national inquiries. For different reasons, these silent voices opt for an 'anonymous life' and do not want to be associated with their past. This is clearly formulated by one of the respondents in our research:

> *"There are of course former orphans who do not want any contact. Once I saw a former orphaned girl and said: Henrietta! How are you doing? She said she didn't know me and I mentioned 'Prince Filip'. But then again, she said she didn't know it and walked away."*

Any kind of public statement now can potentially associate these 'silent voices' unknowingly or against their will with 'a version' of their past. Former orphans who were possibly caught in abusive practices in the past are likewise currently at risk of being the object of a process of victimisation based on what allegedly happened to them.

5.5.2 Criminalisation

Our second critique directs attention to what we call the process of rewriting (national) history which is the ambition underlying many national inquiries. As the Irish Minister for children and youth affairs wrote in the foreword of the report (2009): *"the history of our country in the 20th century will be rewritten as a result of the Ryan Commission of Inquiry"*. In the Australian national apology, this objective is described as *"by saying sorry we can correct the historical record"*. Others seize this point as the risk inherent to this apologising practice, and assert that the role and value of scientific research with regard to historical abuse should therefore be reconsidered. As professor emeritus Walter Hellinckx expressed in a Belgian newspaper, *"it seems to be a bit hypocritical now to recall a committee of scientists who will rewrite history"* (FR, 2013, pp. 7-8). The potential risk here is that societies look at their national past in an a-historical way: historical research has to contextualise and ground their analysis and historical explanations of abuse fully against the background of a specific time period, since welfare state institutions cannot be seen in a historical vacuum or as detached from a broader society (Ferguson, 2007).

In this respect, a possible process of criminalisation of the professionals or alleged perpetrators can be at play in the attempt of researchers to reconstruct and judge social realities according to a truth logic of what really happened. We understand this as a *"process by which behaviours and individuals are transformed into crime and criminals"* (Michalowski, 1985, p. 6). The fact that various actors, apart from the formerly abused children, are never involved in inquiries into historical abuse is therefore striking. Our case study on the Ghent orphanages also shows that the biographical accounts of the former orphans reflect strong similarities but equally well

a true struggle about their 'collective past'. This struggle embodies a fierce disagreement and even conflict about 'how it was' and how the Ghent orphanages should be remembered. As a result, alternative perspectives on these historically embedded social realities are easily overlooked, and the complexity and ambiguity of a particular case tends to be disregarded. In our view, an effect of such a research approach implies the underexposure of so-called 'good stories' in these (national) inquiry reports. They are, at best, briefly mentioned in the reports. Paul Michael Garrett (2010) emphasises that autobiographical narratives also mention 'good Brothers'. Inspired by *Founded on Fear,* the book of Peter Tyrrell (2006), Garrett observes that Tyrrell *"is careful not to castigate all of the Brothers and remains only intent on unmasking those responsible for violence. Indeed, he acknowledges that some of the Brothers, and associated members of staff, were good to the boys"* (Garrett, 2010, p. 295). In her article *Never a Better Home: Growing Up in American Orphanages, 1920-1970*, Birgitte Søland (2015) also attempts to go beyond the unanimous condemnation of such institutions.

In our study, we therefore considered their memories as narratives of meaning rather than event (Portelli, 2012). The study has taught us that the history of welfare state institutions is better considered as a never ending contested space rather than as a closed chapter (De Wilde & Vanobbergen, 2015). In an attempt to make sense of their tumultuous past, the former orphans clearly contextualise their experiences in both time and space. One of the former orphans addresses this very sharply:

> *"In hindsight, we didn't had it so bad… Because we had everything, the only thing we didn't have was our father and mother. We should not say that we had no food; we always had plenty of food. Although we had to wear them out, we had clothes. We had a place to sleep, we had everything we needed. In hindsight … "*

5.6 In search of social justice

Our critiques of the victimisation as well as the criminalisation process lead us to radically question the ambition of the politics of apology to apologise and give recognition on both an individual as well as on a collective level.

On an individual level, giving recognition appears as a problematic desire in the search of social justice since personal memories and experiences form the basis of constructing a common historical narrative leading to an official apology (Sköld, 2013). An attempt to do justice to the singularity, ambiguity and complexity of the stories and experiences of former residents of welfare state institutions seems a more productive perspective when dealing with inquiries about the abuse of children in

institutional care. If this is the case, recognition has to mean something different than determining and distinguishing 'the truth'. As the construction of a 'common historical narrative' seems rather impossible, an alternative path has to be paved. In line with Ignatieff (1996) who formulates some fundamental doubts about the reconciling and healing potential of telling 'the' historical truth, we plea for a nuanced interpretation of 'the past' that questions the fundamental and normative 'truth logic' within the politics of apology. It is, however, equally important that policy makers and researchers take a stance in tackling the failures of the social welfare system in the past, especially on a collective level.

On a collective level, we argued that societies should learn to reflect on the broader lessons for how we understand child abuse in the past and in the present (Ferguson, 2007), since there are continuities between historical practices and contemporary responses of welfare states (Garrett, 2010). By issuing an official apology, the question always remains which or whose 'truth' is exactly acknowledged by the apologisers. When an official apology is raised on behalf of the welfare state according to a 'truth logic', uncovering the bare truth and apologising for it can lead to the persuasion that 'we' (as a society) 'will never do this again' since there is now an end to the matter. Based on the global practice of the politics of apology, an official and public apology often implies a 'promise that it will never happen again'. Or as Stamato (2008, p. 395) puts it: *"a commitment to the future"* has to be made in order for an apology to have clout. In 2013, for example, the Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard promised in the national apology for forced adoption that this practice would never happen again and expressed a commitment to provide the much needed help for the so-called victims of abuse. Particularly from the viewpoint of historical researchers, giving recognition on a collective level is therefore a fascinating dilemma and challenge.

In the next section, we explore the relevance of 'the presence paradigm' to rethink the relation between the past and present.

5.6.1 A dark chapter in history?

In order to go beyond the currently rather dominant truth logic underlying the politics of apology, we suggest that it is necessary to rethink the relationship between the past and the present. The idea that the past can be perceived as a dark yet also a closed chapter in the history of Western welfare states is no longer tenable in our view. The implications of this shift in thinking about the past and present is very significant in light of the common belief that *"the past is past only because it passed, because it's gone, and therefore no longer present"* (Bevernage, 2007, p. 183). This has been the dominant belief of researchers in the theory of history for several decades, whose point of departure embodies that the past has to be considered as distant and absent from the present, and is precisely for that reason the object of

historical research. In this vein, some authors (Bos, 2010) refer to a true 'obsession with the past'.

This conceptualisation of historical research, in which it is possible to capture 'the past', is consistent with the initial reason why we opted for oral history research in our case study. We examined the history of the Ghent orphanages with the intention to analyse and contextualise the histories of the Ghent orphan houses as it 'used to be', based on the personal narratives of both former orphaned children and their educators. They offered us a unique insider's perspective and this allowed us to (re)construct the last chapter of the history of the Ghent orphanages. At the same time, nonetheless, by interviewing so many involved actors, we realised that the history of the Ghent orphanages is still an ongoing construction process in the present, since the former orphans play a crucial and central role in this chapter. In our study, we experienced that the past cannot simply be considered as 'past' and therefore the history of the Ghent orphanages seems to be caught in what Ignatieff (1996) calls an eternal present. How we think about notions of 'the past' and 'the present' therefore became a pivotal discussion topic in our research, and this enabled us to explore the idea that the past is still present and should be relevant in the consideration of contemporary social issues.

5.6.2 A presence of the past

Discussions about what 'the past' actually is and what we consider as 'history' are not new. Since the nineties, however, questions about the meaning of history and our relationship with the past gradually became a more important academic issue due to the growing societal attention for the past in the spirit of memory, remembrance and nostalgia (Bos, 2010). Consequently, historians slowly began to consider the idea that the past isn't simply gone (Bevernage, 2007), or as the title of Luc Huysse's (2006) book suggests, 'everything passes except the past'. Accordingly, a shift took place from 'an obsession with the past' towards the awareness of the possible significance of the past for the present (Bos, 2010).

In recent years, the idea of a 'presence of the past' found its way into the domain of the theory of history as well as within broader societies (Bevernage, 2008). In the theory of history, the dichotomy between the past and the present is heavily criticised (Bevernage, 2008; Bos, 2010; Runia, 2006). In order to rethink notions as 'the past' and 'the present', Bevernage (2008) argues that historians should leave behind the dichotomy between absent and present. Moreover, Western societies also seem to realise that 'the past' is not gone by publicly apologising for it. These societies try to acknowledge, under the influence of various appeals by victims of historical injustice and their heirs claiming that the past is not dead and gone, that 'the past' is still existing in the present-day. Although the inquiry reports attempt to give the past a place in the present in some way or another, pursuing a politics of apology potentially

discredits and undermines this intention. A public apology is not seldom used to mark the end of a discussion, discontent or controversy. In the words of Gibney (2008), states and private actors now offer apologies to groups and individuals in the hope that they can thereby 'close' the memory of an incident. An apology principally does little more than acknowledging nothing new:

"Depending on the nature of the conflict, the narration of the past in official reports frequently takes the form of a procedural articulation of the known, which does little more than acknowledge officially what might be called public secrets" (Bevernage, 2010, p. 112).

This apologising practice in itself could announce the end of the dialogue instead of creating a public forum for debate about contemporary issues (Garrett, 2010). Rather than situating the value and power of these childhood narratives as a 'reality check' of the past, these storied realities can offer us an opportunity to (re)think the past, the present and the future of Western welfare states. As Riesman (2000, p. 20) puts it, *"the 'truths' of narrative accounts lie not in their faithful representation of a past world, but in the shifting connections they forge between past, present, and future"*.

As theorists engaged with developing and underpinning the presence idea, the work of Berber Bevernage (2007, 2008, 2009, 2010) and Eelco Runia (2006) is particularly fascinating in this context as they discuss how historians can (re)consider the relationship between the past and the present. This school of thought that develops the notion of 'the presence of the past' is still in its infancy. In this paradigmatic frame of reference, it becomes possible for the past to be simultaneously present and absent (Bos, 2010). As such, it is possible to transcend the present-absent dichotomy (see Bevernage, 2008). Thereby, this paradigm affords us a better understanding of haunting pasts and enables a far more acceptable account of historical injustice (Bevernage, 2008). In this context, the Dutch philosopher of history Eeclo Runia (2006) introduced the notion of 'presence'. In Runia's paradigm, the ambivalent ontological status of the presence or non-absent past is the central idea. His concept of 'presence' mainly refers to how the past can be present in the present-day (Bos, 2010). According to Runia, the term 'presence' can break open the issue of discontinuity between the past and the present, as he puts forward the idea that it is ultimately not 'meaning' we are looking for, but 'presence'. *"In order to come to grips with discontinuity we have to focus not on the past but on the present, not on history as what is irremediably gone, but on history as ongoing process"* (Runia, 2006, p. 8). The pursuit of a common historical narrative, in the words of Runia (2006), suggests that 'meaning' can be given to the present by constructing continuity with narratives about the past. These ideas might be particularly interesting for our attempt to search for an alternative way of offering individual as well as collective recognition.

5.7 Conclusion

In our view, an apology should never have the intent of marking the end of a discussion but should generate discussions on how individual as well as collective recognition can be offered regarding a historical injustice. As Stamato (2008, p. 397) asserts about what an apology may be worth in the long run: *"what seems to make public apologies matter, in the end, is where they lead, what they generate, what happens as a result of them"*. The question however remains whether a public, official apology should merely lead to the implementation of methods of recognition for different groups of claimants and different forms of historical injustices, or should generate and encourage a thorough reflection on contemporary (possibly abusive) practices and policies in Western welfare states. As we are in search of ways for historical researchers to capture and incorporate the ambiguities and (dis)continuities of historical injustices done to the victims of abuse while opening up the dialogue and embracing the limits of the quest for recognition, the presence paradigm seems to embody a significant contribution. These theorists argue that it becomes possible for historical researchers to contribute to the quest for social justice of contemporary societies (Bos, 2010). According to the Dutch historian and philosopher Frank Ankersmit, the notion of presence provides unique insights into the limits of historical representation (Bos, 2010), since it entails that giving recognition on a collective level implies that *"interpretation should be attentive to inconsistency and ambiguities in stories rather than assuming one story and a simple receptiveness of the audience"* (Roberts, 2002, p. 7).

In this vein, it is essential to see that offering a public apology is only one interpretation of how individual as well as collective recognition can be given in the quest for social justice. This attempt to give recognition is a complex issue that is only occasionally discussed in the margins of the (national) inquiry reports. Yet in some reports policy recommendations are made by the commissioned researchers in which it is suggested that, next to issuing a public apology, recognition can be given by putting up an exhibition, publishing a book, putting up a statue in the public sphere, affixing a commemorative plague, mentioning 'the dark' past on current websites of the institutions, organising meetings or self-help groups for fellow victims of abuse, offering psychological support and so on. If we look at the case of Flanders, for instance, after issuing the public apology for historical abuse in state welfare institutions in April 2014, an exhibition was set up that deals with the topic of historical abuse in state welfare institutions, and an urgency helpline is installed in order to respond immediately to the complaints of the victims of abuse. Despite the well-intended efforts made by the authorities, nevertheless, even a diversity of ways to give recognition may possibly not meet the concerns or wishes of all claimants. Moreover, the complicated dilemma concerning recognition given on an individual

level should be complemented with the question of how a society can recognise that the past should be relevant for contemporary welfare state arrangements.

Due to the fact that disagreements and discussions on who should organise these exhibitions, who should write the book for which audience, or where the statue should be put down, consequently provide controversial yet fundamental questions for researchers and policy makers involved in the politics of apology. If we embrace the idea that historical representations cannot simply be true or false but should be considered as proposals to review historical realities in a certain light (Froeyman, 2012), historical researchers can play an important role in giving individual as well as collective recognition. The historical researcher can question the obviousness of institutional problem constructions through which people learn to accept social injustice, by which the 'unquestioned' becomes 'questionable' (Schuyt, 1972). Raising a multiplicity of interpretative repertoires by giving the past a place in the present through various ways is pivotal in the quest for social justice. This implies that knowledge claims resulting from national inquiries can, besides a public apology, equally well be (re)presented and raised as questionable issues rather than neutral facts to stimulate a reflexive process of humanisation in our societies (Roets, Roose & Bouverne-De Bie, 2013).

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Chapter 6

Puzzling history. The personal file in residential care: a source for life history and historical research[59]

Abstract

Since the turn of the century the debate on personal file documents in the context of out-of-home-care has been revived under the influence of large groups of former institutionalised children, claiming their right to get insights into their personal records. This paper explores the meanings of this historical document as a research source for both the historical researcher and the adult care leaver in the context of the Ghent orphanages (1945-1984). Based on the experiences of former orphans in consulting their file, we come to the conclusion that the 'personal files' of the Ghent orphans provide some new information but at the same time leave a lot unresolved. As it was possible for the historical researcher to (re)write a collective historiography of the last chapter of the Ghent orphanages, it seems rather difficult to perceive this file as 'the key to the past' for the former orphans in an attempt to (re)construct their own, individual life history.

59 De Wilde, L. & Vanobbergen, B. (Submitted), Puzzling history. The personal file in residential care: a source for life history and historical research. History of Education: Journal of the History of Education Society.

6.1 Introduction

"Adrianna has a riotous character and a fiery temperament, but mentally she is not very developed; she definitely needs guidance. She is aware of this and usually accepts good advice. She has a nice, orderly appearance, however she looks older than her age."[60]

Thirty-five years after her departure from 'Prince Filip', a former orphanage of the city of Ghent, Adrianna read this description of her behaviour for the first time in an old social welfare report stored in her personal file. For all these years, the Bureau of Social Welfare of the city of Ghent (a city in Flanders, Dutch speaking part of Belgium) preserved the official records of her stay in the orphanage. On the advice of another former orphaned girl, she submitted an application to get access to her personal file. It turned out to be a very moving experience:

> *"Some time ago I was able to look into all my documents. They warned us: 'beware, because there may be cruel things in there' so we would not be shocked. I photocopied a few documents but I will go to ask if they can copy my entire file. I cannot read all the misery of my childhood at once. It is very difficult to read it all but I do want to know. I will not read my file when I'm feeling sad, but I will when I'm feeling fine. Otherwise it is much too hard."*

This introductory quote and remarks by a former orphaned girl directs our gaze towards the central theme of this chapter: 'the personal file'. During the last few years, we studied the history of the three remaining orphanages in the city of Ghent (Belgium) after World War II. In order to get a grip on the history of this particular educational context, we implemented two research methods: an archival research and an oral history research. The archival documents and, in particular, the personal files of each former orphaned child were of great importance for our own research. These files gave us a lot of information on, for example, the kind of population of the orphanages and the different reasons for admittance. During the interviews with former orphans and educators we learned rather quickly that the personal file currently plays a significant role in the life of our respondents as well. Several of the former orphans – men and women - told us about the search for their personal history and about their wish to consult their file as they lacked information about their childhood. This makes the personal file a principal source in several ways. It is an important source for us as researchers, but at the same time it is a source of

60 Personal file. Social welfare report 04/01/1975. Archives Bureau of Social Welfare, Ghent.

information for the main actors in our research, the former orphans. For both it functions as an important key to 'the past', even though this quest serves completely different purposes.

Tracking and collecting all kinds of personal information during the stay of a child in residential care is a widespread international practice. Today and in the past, children who spend time in public care and come to the attention of welfare professionals become registered and described in case files or agency records (Gillman, Swain, & Heyman, 1997). For every child in residential or foster care, a case file is drawn up in which information regarding his or her time spent in residential care is collected (Goddard, Murray, & Duncalf, 2013). Consequently, a lot of personal information of children and young people placed in out-of-home care has been collected (and preserved) throughout past decades. This was also the case for each child admitted in a Ghent orphanage after World War II. Between 1945 and 1984, all 1234 children got a personal file.

Discussions on whether, how and why these kind of personal records should be accessible for (former) clients within the field of social work have been going on for decades (See: Cigno & Gottardi, 1989; Doel & Lawson, 1986; Gelman, 1991). Since the seventies, the debate on client access to personal files has been pursued from 'the right to information' perspective. This profoundly challenged the closed nature of this primarily administrative task (Cigno & Gottardi, 1989; Gelman, 1991; Kirton, Feast, & Goddard, 2011). Before the eighties sharing personal file information was extremely rare in Western welfare countries. Above all, personal files were considered as professional tools (Goddard, Murray, & Duncalf, 2013). By the end of the eighties access policies were discussed in most Western welfare states.[61] This led to the creation of a number of data access laws, such as the Data Protection Act (1984) and the Access to Personal Files Act (1987) in the UK (Gelman, 1991). Especially since the International Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, personal data has been made more accessible in all Western welfare states (Goddard, Murray, & Duncalf, 2013). In Flanders, for example, a Parliamentary Act was approved in 2006 on the rights of the child in youth care. The Act clearly states that every child in youth care has the right to consult his or her personal file.

The recent breakthrough of the right to have access to personal files and the several national translations of this right into legislation has had a clear impact on the discussion as to whether former residents of youth care are allowed to consult their personal documents. However, specific concerns are at stake. According to Humphreys (1994), the underlying idea in the past was that children in care deserved

61 For example in the USA, Australia, UK, Canada, Scandinavia, France, The Netherlands, Austria, West-Germany and Portugal

a clean break from their institutionalised lives. In many places this resulted in mass destruction of personal data (Goddard, Murray, & Duncalf, 2013). However, since the turn of the century, this debate has been revived under the influence of large groups of former institutionalised children, claiming their right to get insight into their personal records. Before, only isolated individuals made these kinds of claims (See: Doel & Lawson, 1986; Kirton, Feast, & Goddard, 2011). In particular in those Western welfare states were national governments commissioned inquiries into alleged historical abuse of children in public services, a rising demand to get access to personal files is noticeable. As Humphreys and Kertesz (2012, p. 27) point out for Australia: *"since the publication of the enquiries, requests by past care leavers for their records have increased significantly"*.

This is also the case for Flanders. During the time of our research, the Flemish authorities installed a special commission to collect testimonies of victims of violence and abuse in schools and youth care, from the past up until today. Many respondents in our research referred to this process, even if they themselves were not part of it. The work of the special commission gave rise to a growing consciousness about what happened in the past, with a focus on what went wrong in schools and institutions. Maybe, therefore, it is not surprising that former orphans became more interested in refiguring their own past. By rethinking their own past they became exposed to the question of whether they had the right to get access to information about their childhood. In this, new perspectives and ideas on childcare interact with what happened in the past. Or at least with questions about what happened in the past. In this way, *"the evolving policy and practice framework for post-care adults seeking information reflects changes in social care, in turn, a wider social context"* (Kirton, Feast, & Goddard, 2011, p. 913).

The voice of these adult care leavers broadened the debate concerning the writing and preservation of personal records in such a way that a growing international plea is audible to make historical records of children once placed in out of home care (more) accessible. Adult care leavers repeatedly testified persuasively on why and how access to their personal records is essential for their identity (Humphreys & Kertesz, 2014). Those who defend this idea claim that the information would help former institutionalised children reconstruct their childhood history. Presuming that these adult care leavers cannot rely on parent(s) or other family relatives to tell them about their childhood, origin and birth, it is argued that consulting their personal records could replace this lack of information (See: Goddard, Murray, & Duncalf, 2013; Horrocks & Goddard, 2006; Humphreys & Kertesz 2012, 2014; Murray & Humphreys, 2014).

The personal file is attributed a pivotal place in past and current historical research on out-of-home care for both the adult care leaver and the historical researcher. The historical personal file of children in out-of-home-care is also the central subject of

this chapter. The focus is not on the question of 'accessibility' of these records. In this contribution we shift our gaze towards the 'next phase' in this quest for information: the different meanings of the personal file, in the past and today. The reason why we pay attention to both perspectives can be traced back to our own oral history research with nearly 50 former orphans and staff members. Our recent study on the Ghent orphanages enables us to reflect on the meanings of 'the personal file' for both 'audiences' who retrospectively consult these files. We first unravel what the concept of the 'personal file' means in the context of the Ghent orphanages. What exactly can be considered as a dossier? What does it possibly consist of? In the next parts of this chapter we reflect on both the parallels and different finalities of the research activities of both researcher and adult care leavers. In the last part we first frame the interest in the personal file in a broader quest and sketch some thresholds and difficulties concerning the consultation of this historical document for the former orphaned children. Second, we examine whether the expectation that these documents are the key source of information in looking for the pieces of a personal past is feasible.

6.2 The personal file?

Our study focuses on the last decades in which the city of Ghent organised residential care for a group of children, labelled as orphans. In 1945 two orphan houses remained, one for girls and the other for boys. These orphanages were run completely separately from each other, each in different parts of town. In 1962 both groups of orphans went to a new home called 'Prince Filip'. Here the girls and boys lived in separate wings of the same building and this would remain so until 1984. Next to a research in the archives of the Public Centre for Social Welfare, we conducted 45 interviews with 40 former orphans and five ex-staff members which all took place between 2010 and 2012. The youngest interviewee was 53 years old, the oldest more than 90. The average interview lasted approximately two and a half hours and took place at the home of the interviewee. All our respondents lived or worked for some time in a Ghent orphanage during the period 1945 to 1984, the year in which the last Ghent orphanage organised by the city of Ghent closed its doors.

During our research an interesting interaction arose between two different 'audiences' of the same historical source: 'the personal file'. On the one hand, the personal records of the Ghent orphans were read and analysed by us, historical researchers. On the other hand, for over twenty years these records have been accessible for all former orphaned children.[62] The personal file of every child is

62 Although not everybody consulted his or her personal file or was aware of the possibility to consult it.

preserved in the archives of the Public Centre for Social Welfare of Ghent. These records in essence 'kept track' of the children as an instrument for professionals in residential care to monitor the children and youngsters over a period of time (Brickell, 2013). In the case of the Ghent orphanages many of the children spent their entire childhood at the orphanage, entering at the age of 3 and leaving when they became 18 (the boys) or 21 (the girls). The principal and the educators of the orphanages kept track of the 1234 dossiers. According to Hennum (2010, p. 339), *"this means that the documents about these children are products reflecting the gazes of authorized writers and choices of words. These writers decisions about what events in the lives of children are to be reported or ignored".*

These personal files are currently alphabetically ordered and split by gender. In general the following kinds of documents can be found in every file: an admittance, financial and medical sheet, and correspondence between the Bureau of Social Welfare, the principal, the parents and the school. Many files also contain school documents and report cards, socio-psychological observations, and evaluations of the child. Personal memorabilia such as photos, invitations and cards of their first and Solemn Communion are to be found as well. One former orphaned girl, for example, came across a birthday card in her personal file. She wrote the card decades ago for a boy she liked but back then 'mysteriously' disappeared from her desk. It was a big surprise to find it back after more than 50 years. Furthermore, documents concerning the guardianship of the children and a 'letter of resignation' are commonly present.

Of course, the length and content of every file varies according to the different personal history of each child. Depending on their own circumstances and trajectories, the content varies (to a large extent) between the orphaned children (Goddard, Murray, & Duncalf, 2013). By and large the records of the Ghent orphanages contain some (family) background information of the specific child: their date of birth, the date of admittance, the family composition, home address, and in many cases a short description of the demeanour of the parents and/or admittance reason of the child. In addition, information about the child's school life, residential pathways and the physical and/or psychological condition can be retrieved. In almost every file the reason and date of the child's discharge is noted. In sum, these files contain various traces of every child's childhood, including personal context and history. The personal files as found in the archives of the Public Centre for Social Welfare can be considered as typical examples of dossiers in out-of-home care of that time (See: Gillman, Swain, & Heyman, 2010; Goddard, Murray, & Duncalf, 2013; Kirton, Feast, & Goddard, 2011).

The personal files of the Ghent orphans also evolved over time. During the period 1945-1984 we see that child records become more bulky. The number of documents and pages increases exponentially over the years. Whereas in the 1940s a complete file consisted of less than ten pages, in the 1970s and 1980s the number of pages

increased to more than a hundred in some cases. The specific functions or goals of these files within the daily operation of these institutions are difficult to ascertain. In none of the remaining general policy documents is reference explicitly made to the upkeep or filling out of the personal files of the children by the principal or the educators. We found a fragment entitled 'reporting' in a detailed document on 'internal order' of the year 1968, addressed to the staff of the girls' orphanage. It states that regular internal reporting of the children, orally and on paper, is essential in the work of the educators. A quarterly written report by the head-educator on both negative and positive aspects of each child is requested on the following itemised subjects: 'behaviour' – 'care' – 'appearance' – 'study and work' – 'talents' – 'flair' – 'failures' – 'common mistakes' – 'politeness' – 'helpfulness' – 'social interaction'.[63] Even though the notion of a 'personal file' is never mentioned in this document, we did found some documents resembling this description within the personal files.

In the next sections we focus on the function and use of these personal files for both 'audiences'. We first highlight the procedure and motives of the former orphaned children to consult their personal record decennia after leaving the orphan house and in the second instance, we consider how and why 'the personal file' can be of interest to the historical researcher.

6.2.1 The personal file and the former orphaned children

First of all, it is important to point out that many of the children were unaware of the fact that their personal information was registered and collected in what we today call a personal file. The personal file was made about the child, not for the child. And also not by the child. *"Not a single document in the files examined and analysed had been written by the children and adolescent who were the subjects of these files"* (Hennum, 2010, p. 340). The records of these children and young people growing up in care were certainly intended to be read by different 'audiences' but not by the children themselves (Humphreys & Kertesz, 2012; Brickell, 2013). Some orphaned children, however, managed to find a way around this prohibition in order to take a glance at their personal records.

> *"Everyone had a personal file, but that was something secret. We knew where they were stored, so when the educator was not there for a moment we searched the closet to get a glimpse of our file. At a certain age you start to get curious and you want to have a look in your own dossier. Or if the educators would write something in it, we would go and have a look."*

63 006-02/1/2010/36 Rules of internal order of home 'Prince Filip' and documents related to the daily schedules. Archives Public Centre for Social Welfare, Ghent.

Since the closure of the last orphanage in 1984, a lot has changed. The files are currently being consulted and photocopied. Many of the former orphans have taken the opportunity to consult their personal file. In the mid-nineties the Public Centre for Social Welfare decided that all personal files should become accessible to the former orphaned children. This decision was based on the Federal Law of April 11th, 1994 concerning 'open management'. This law stipulates the obligation of a board to make documents or information available to the public. This right includes inspecting the file and obtaining copies of it. Before that time obtaining access to a personal file was, in the words of a former male educator, 'mission impossible'.

> *"In Home Prince Filip it was never possible [to get access to your file] and then there was the liberalisation of the files of the children of the Bureau of Social Welfare. At one stage they finally got access to their file. This started ten or twelve years ago. Before that time it was mission impossible. It started with the medical records. Occasionally when the former orphans met, they talked about it, I've achieved that and I got access to that. And the next day they would go to the Bureau of Social Welfare and ask about their own files."*

In order to obtain access to their file as former orphans some conditions need to be taken into account. First of all, it is only possible to retrieve his or her own file, not the dossier of a sibling. Second, an application in which they must prove their identity has to be filed with the Public Centre for Social Welfare. The former orphans also have to register themselves at the archive of the Bureau of Social Welfare where they get the opportunity to read and consult their personal file. The decision to consult their personal record is often influenced by their spouse, children and in many cases on the advice of fellow former orphaned children.

> *"At an exhibition about the Ghent orphanages, they [other former orphans] told me 'you have to reclaim your personal file'. This sounds quite normal today, but when we would've done that back then, we would've got expelled. I needed to see that file because I never knew what was in it. There are many things in there, of which you think 'what were they doing?' They wrote things about what they thought about you, but not about what you thought. You couldn't defend yourself. They had made up their mind and had a certain opinion about you."*

Based on the request figures with regard to the consultation of personal files it is clear that today many former orphaned children have found their way to the archive of the Public Centre for Social Welfare. Our oral history research as well as the

accompanying exhibition and book played an important role.[64] The annual average of four applications increased to 17 in 2010, to 26 in 2011 and in 2012 it was 15. Nevertheless, up until now a considerable part of the former orphans don't have a clue about the existence of a personal file. Others are (still) unaware of the possibility to consult their own file or are for numerous reasons rather reluctant to do so. Goddard, Murray and Duncalf (2013) have shown that most adult care leavers that start to show interest in and take the step towards consulting their institutional records are middle-aged. Based on our interviews, we can buttress this conclusion. The personal file becomes more meaningful later in life and can be considered as a part of a more wide-ranging quest.

> *"Most of them thought, until twenty years ago, I leave Home Prince Filip and that world is closed forever. They have forgotten that they once were raised there. However, nowadays many of the former orphans start to think about consulting their file." (former educator)*

During the interviews it was apparent that the former orphans literally and figuratively needed space in their lives to get used to the idea of telling their childhood history and consulting their personal records. *"If you would've asked me ten years ago to tell my story, I would not have done it"* was a frequently heard remark. When their own children have left the house, they have retired and in general when adult care leavers get older, they start to look back on their lives (Goddard, Murray, & Duncalf, 2013). In the case of the former orphans they come to the conclusion that a lot of questions concerning their childhood linger. Why was I admitted in the orphanage? On what date did I arrive? Who is my father? How many brothers and/or sisters do I have? Why do I have so many problems with my teeth? Why could we visit our father but not our mother? Are their pictures of my childhood? Did my parent(s) try to get me back home? Why did my sister stay in another institution?

To this day many of the former orphans still cherish the hope in finding some clues or answers to these questions. In other cases the former orphans don't necessarily have specific questions. They are above all curious about their childhood and express the hope of finding some memories or personal anecdotes about themselves. Many of them aspire to find some pictures about them as a child. As a former girl told us about the visit she and a former orphan boy paid to the archives: *"And then Danny found a picture of himself in his file, of his Solemn Communion on which he was posing so proud. He was so overwhelmed that he cried like a little child... unbelievable".* Taking

64 Based on our research we put up an exhibition in 2011 'Publiek geheim: dagboek van een weeskind' ('Open secret: diary of an orphan'), in association with the archive of the Public Centre for Social Welfare. A year later a book from our hand was published 'Mag ik dit vertellen? Stemmen uit de Gentse weeshuizen (1945-1984) (Can I tell this? Voices from the Ghent orphanages (1945-1984)).

these things in consideration, it is clear that any confrontation with personal files today raises many questions. As Goddard, Murray, and Duncalf (2013, p. 760) put it *"any usefulness [of such files] for the adult care leaver was an unintentional by-product"*. These files were never written with the aim to be read by the child in care nor the adult care leaver.

6.2.2 The personal file and the historical researcher

The scientific attention for the use of 'the personal file' within the context of historical (educational) research is rather limited. There is barely any literature on methodological issues related to 'file analysis'. Nonetheless, a lot of international research on residential institutions for children in the past decades has been done. These often include a thorough analysis of some sort of 'personal file' or 'dossier' of children and young people (See for example: Brickell, 2013; Grosvenor, 1987; Vehkalahti, 2009). The files are analysed because *"the contents of these records may describe individuals' personal circumstances and may contain accounts of professional assessment and intervention"* (Gillman, Swain, & Heyman, 1997, p. 677). But an analysis of these files also sheds light on a specific institution for children since it brings together individual lives with institutional expectations (Brickell, 2013). The study of dossiers is an essential element in many of these research designs in order to (re)construct the history of childhood. In addition, as is the case for our research: *"a lot of these researches focus on people in care in the middle decades of the last century, whose files reflect the recording and childcare policies of that time"* (Humpreys & Kertesz, 2012, p. 2). Historians usually look at these institutions as finished projects attempting to (re)construct their history by contextualising it against the background of a specific era.

Our research project on the Ghent orphanages initially had a similar objective in mind. The documents that were stored in the archives of the Bureau of Social Welfare in Ghent were an important source in studying the last chapter of the history of the Ghent orphanages. In particular, we analysed the personal files of every registered child but also the annual reports, the enrolment registers and general policy documents. In order to get access to the archives we had to file an application at the start of our study with the Commission of Protection of Privacy. The approval of the application should assure *"that personal data are handled with care and thoroughly protected and that your future privacy also remains guaranteed"* (http://www.privacycommission.be). During our study every visit to the archives of the Bureau of Social Welfare started out with written registration of the researcher and an enumeration of all consulted documents. The ultimate goal of our archival research in general aimed to get insights into the dynamics, policies and daily operation of the Ghent orphanages.

Our main research ambition in consulting the personal files of the former orphans was twofold. First, we wanted to replete the personal narratives with the 'official' story. Consulting the personal files enabled us to confront the oral histories of our respondents with the childhood stories from an institutional point of view. Quite often discrepancies between 'the official' information and the narrative of the interviewees popped up. During the interviews we were confronted with the fact that in several cases we knew more 'facts' about the childhood of the respondent then they did, since we had done research and got access to all the archival documents. This was especially apparent when the former orphans referred to their 'ignorance' in the sense of 'lacking information' about several aspects of their life history. They raised, for example, questions about their original family composition, the reasons for their admittance, and their date of entry and duration of their stay in the orphanage. Many of them indicated that they were deprived of basic information about their lives. In some cases we could (partly) fill in these gaps of information using the information retrained from the documents in the archive. For all those who did not consult their file, the date of entrance seemed to be unknown. In that case we decided to inform our respondents. All former orphans were thrilled to receive more information as they could finally replace the idea of 'I first came to the orphanage somewhere in winter' with a more specific day, month and year. However, at these moments it was a particularly strange feeling to know more about their life stories than them. It seemed fair to inform each of the adult care leavers about the opportunity to request the consultation of their personal file in the archive of the Bureau of Social Welfare.

Second, we wanted to get insights in the specific reasons why these children were admitted to a Ghent orphanage in the first place. Due to the fact that 'being without parents' was not the motive over eighty per cent of the time, our examination of the personal files specifically concentrated on the admittance reasons. However, in most cases a specific, detailed reason for admittance was not given. Every child was appointed to a category as to why he or she was admitted in the orphanage. Up to the nineteen-sixties the child was or 'a real orphan' or it was indicated that the parents were 'unable to raise the child(ren)'. Later on, this reason was deepened but even then the description remained in general and vague terms. For example, reasons such as 'moral incompetence', 'unfavourable family situation' and 'difficulties with the concubine' were distinguished. The analysis of these files led to an interesting ascertainment. Despite the fact that they dealt with different girls and boys in a diversity of situations, the files show a remarkable similarity (Hennum, 2010). In this vein, it was rather difficult to get a clear idea on why the children were admitted to the Ghent orphanages.

After discussing this historical source from both perspectives, it becomes clear that various parallels can be drawn between the 'research activities' of both the researcher

and the respondent. The former orphans as well as the historical researcher turn to the personal files as a historical source in order to (re)construct the past. However, the destination of both research processes seems to be very different. As the historical researcher attempts to (re)write a collective historiography, former institutionalised children on their part try to (re)construct their own, individual life history. The high expectations cherished by the former orphans are fundamentally related to the wish to puzzle their life narrative together and hence to finally find some closure. This process is not without a hitch. Several difficulties, obstacles and pitfalls inherent to the process of retrospective consulting of personal records are enclosed in the next part of the chapter.

6.3 Meanings and complications of the personal file

All former orphans who take an interest in their personal file hope to discover traces or missing pieces of their childhood. This is based on the idea that 'official' information would enable them to complete the puzzle of their life's narrative. Besides the personal files, other actors from the past could possibly help in reconstructing the former orphans' time in care (Goddard, Murray, & Duncalf, 2013). Attempts to find former foster parents, former educators, social workers, family members or even other former orphaned children willing to share their story does not appear to be without complications. In the case of the Ghent orphans, most have and know various family members. In several cases they shared some information or memories from the past to help them in their search. As a former orphaned boy told us about his search for the identity and grave of his long lost father: *"After figuring out where my grandmother lived, I went to visit her. I then saw a picture of my father for the first time, for the very first time. I said I would visit her again, without forcing anything."*

However, this information is quite often fragmented, vague and in equally as many cases the adult care leaver lacks the necessary family ties. In the case of the fellow former orphans another aspect is at play that fundamentally complicates their search. By sharing their individual narrative of their childhood, the former orphans come into contact with one another. They have their own former orphan association with many meetings, exhibitions, book presentations and Facebook groups. In this process of exchanging memories, it becomes clear that not all the storylines match (See De Wilde & Vanobbergen, 2015). The former residents argue about all aspects of 'life at the orphanage' (e.g., receiving presents for Christmas or the quest for the worst educator). As a result, conflicts arise on a regular basis. So despite their ambition of getting more information or acknowledgment for their personal story, this bonding and sharing process results in a lot of dissolution and frustration.

Accordingly, the personal file seems to be the only remaining source of 'objective' information about the past. Especially for those who have stayed almost their entire lives in care, their personal file is perceived as the most important research source as these official records are considered to be the only record of their childhood experience. None the least because these files take on a 'truth-like' status and are mainly considered to be ready and complete analysable 'documentary material' (Hennum, 2010). Even though the gaps in the life stories of the former orphans logically differ, the great expectations with regard to getting access to their file do not. *"Many care leavers use their care files in attempts to develop a coherent narrative of their care leavers lives that can connect past and present"* (Biehal, Clayden, Stein, & Wade, 1995, p. 106). This seems to be the main incentive for the former orphaned children of Ghent in turning to their file. The expectations are high. The personal file should to a great extent finally enable them to make sense of their past and present life.

A lot of international research confirms the importance of retrospective consultation of the personal file, suggesting that we all need stories from the past to help build our identity (See: Goddard, Murray, & Duncalf, 2013; Horrocks & Goddard, 2006; Humphreys & Kertesz, 2014; Murray & Humphreys, 2012, 2014). As Widdershoven (1993, p. 4) puts it: *"the meaning of life is dependent upon the stories that surround it"*. These life stories are crucial for our identity, as each of us construct them based on (told) memories in an attempt to make sense of our life (Gillman, Swain, & Heyman, 1997). Life stories, in fact, tell us who we are. For most people, this so-called 'stock of stories' is accessible from family, friends and the community in which they have grown up. In many cases, the former orphans do not have the experience or prospect of sharing memories, letters, or photo albums. Consequently, as Horrocks and Goddard (2006, p. 265) have pointed out *"accessing child care files, with their mixture of new and forgotten personal information, can be a hugely significant event in the self-identity story-telling projects of these adult"*. In other words, those who spend their childhood in segregation are to a large extent dependent on 'the institution' to make their 'stock of stories' available (Gillman, Swain, & Heyman, 1997). It is, however, crucial to note that life histories cannot be considered as neutral 'facts' but are *"narratives that are shaped and structured in the telling of the story"* (Gillman, Swain, & Heyman, 1997, p. 681).

Nonetheless, many authors pay comparable attention to the possible difficulties and disappointments that individual care leavers might experience when retrospectively consulting their personal file (See: Gillman, Swain, & Heyman, 1997; Humphreys & Kertesz, 2014; Kirton, Feast, & Goddard, 2011). Besides the opportunity to build their identity based on information retrieved from their file, consulting it possibly contains a downside for the adult care leaver. This was clearly the case for many of our respondents in some way or another. As this former educator picked up:

> *"Now it is possible [getting access to your personal file], for many people that's a relief. In contrast, others are severely frustrated by the things they find out now. They wonder if they can still press charges against a person, in order to repay them. For example because of not getting certain things, being thrown out, severely punished for a mistake or bullied by some of my colleagues. Then I say to let it rest."*

Humphreys and Kertesz (2014, p. 2) have pointed out that accessibility of a personal file is in fact rarely without any problems or complications. The experience can be *"hurtful and destructive, with many examples of inaccuracy, judgementalism, and missing information"*. In the testimonies of the former orphans of Ghent several kinds of difficulties or disappointments popped up.

First of all, we focus on complications that arise due to a 'lack of information'. Gillman, Swain and Heyman (1997) assert that a considerable part of the written information is either literally or conceptually inaccessible for adult care leavers. Especially the (technical) jargon and antiquated words or handwriting of the professionals at the time complicates or hinders the understanding of the personal documents. In some cases this results in total discouragement of the adult care leaver to read and inspect their (whole) dossier. In addition, documents and data got lost over time or were even never recorded. Consequently, a lot of respondents claim that important and undisputable information they have knowledge of is nowhere to be found in their file. Throughout the interviews various possible explanations were cautiously whispered. The loss of data can possibly be the result of the many moves of the archival material through the years. Or there has been a clean-up of the files by the principals when the orphanage closed its doors for good. But also the copying of information over the years onto new documents could have led to the discarding of the original documents. Hence the problem of 'incomplete information' is omnipresent. Particularly the lack of contextual or familial information isn't easy to bear for the former orphaned children. In the worst case, there is nothing at all to be found in the personal file of the orphan in question. As was the case for Daniela:

> *"For me there was nothing in it. I felt so sad. I went back to the archive and asked to please have another look. 'Your file is complete and there is nothing in it' I was told. And I would've really liked to have known like what my sister could read in hers, for example: that she thought she was a movie star instead of focusing on school and that she was naughty and so on."*

Next to problems related to a lack of information, the former orphans also need to deal with problems related to the information itself. In some cases it turns out to be a difficult exercise to get a clear picture of the past as the file contains a lot of 'complex

information' (e.g., name or address changes). Much of the information in the files prove to be rather 'unrecognisable' for the persons involved since they themselves, after all those years, had constructed another story or their personal recollections are quite different. As Humphreys and Kertesz (2012, p. 29) state: *"much information contained in care records was written from the standpoint of the professionals who did the recording and rarely includes the child's perspective, resulting in 'narratives' that bear little or no resemblance to the care leaver's own memories"*. Nevertheless, in almost all the cases, the adult care leaver does discover 'new and unknown information' about their time in care:

> *"One thing I did found when looking at my file. I knew I had brothers. We were eight children from six different fathers, and there were two brothers of which I had never heard of. I've written all the information down. [...] But I still do not know who my father is. There was nothing in my file. It said that my father would be a North African and a fugitive. I asked my mother at the time but she claims it's not true. We left it at that."*

In a number of cases the former orphaned children are pleased to take in the additional information concerning their childhood, but all too often this newly found information is overwhelming or even shocking to read. A brother and a sister discovered after more than 50 years, during their joint visit to the archives, that they did not have the same father. Another former orphaned girl still wonders why she was never allowed to go and visit or live with her mother:

> *"And she [stepmother] never wanted us. It is there in black and white in my case file. She didn't want anything to do with the children of her concubine. Cruel! And still it was not enough to let us live with our mother. I actually don't understand and have read the entire file."*

The former orphans often come across unexpected or disturbing information in their personal file that essentially complicates their search of their personal history rather than finalising it. In this regard, it is essential to see that many of the documents within any form of personal dossier in the context of out-of-home-care consists of reported information by professionals, and therefore is not neutral (Brickell, 2013; Roose & Bouverne - De Bie, 2010; Roets, Roose,De Wilde & Vanobbergen, 2016). In other words, these files do not reflect a reality but a certain interpretation or construction of a lived reality. Consequently, we should consider these dossiers as producers of certain kinds of 'stories' (Hennum, 2010).

6.4 The puzzling will never end

The experiences of the former orphaned children of Ghent show that their expectations with regard to the consultation of their personal file are not (entirely) fulfilled. Many former orphans have been disappointed that their files do not contain the information they are looking for. They come across documents within their personal file that mirror the professional gaze of the time towards this group of children. These kinds of documents or reports basically reduce the lives of the orphaned children to a 'set of standardised narratives' (Hennum, 2010). Despite much dissimilarity in family background and personal circumstances of the orphaned children, the records reveal quite similar reporting of deviance and irregular life events. These 'standardised life stories' lack the necessary detailed reporting that the former orphans are looking for. Also striking is that regardless of the amount and type of information that the former orphaned children find in their dossier, their expectations will never be met. The consultation of their personal file does not solve their expectations. It does not entail the end of a quest, but it seems another step in the attempt to fill a certain 'emptiness' in their lives. Most of the former orphans keep searching for answers and traces of their history, their childhood.

In light of these findings the contemporary plea to make all historical records accessible for post care leavers cannot be taken lightly as it does not seem to redeem the promise to make sense of their past and current lives. The current debate concerning historical files should go beyond the notion of accessibility. Historical research with former residents of residential care should play a more crucial role in the debates concerning record-keeping and its different implications, for researchers as well as for the former residents. The personal files in archives are too often solely perceived as parts of the past. We have to be aware that they are part of today and the future too.

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Chapter 7

Discovering different dimensions of research ethics in oral history research: the complexities of going public in the case of the Ghent orphanages[65]

Abstract

In this chapter, we argue that research ethics in the *doing* of oral history research are inadequately addressed in the existing body of research. Although oral history researchers have paid considerable attention to *procedural* ethical issues, there is currently a lack of attention on *situational* research ethics in the doing of oral history. We address particular ethical challenges that we experienced while reconstructing the history of three remaining orphanages after the Second World War in the city of Ghent by drawing on our oral history research from former orphans and ex-staff members. Their rather surprising, yet pertinent, questions enabled us to discover the *political* nature of research ethics, and prompted us to engage in 'going public'. We discuss the complexities of our attempt to provide a 'questionable' historical interpretation for the ambiguous history of these childhood institutions in the recent past.

65 De Wilde, L., Roets, G., & Vanobbergen, B. (Submitted), Discovering different dimensions of research ethics in oral history research: the complexities of going public in the case of the Ghent orphanages. Qualitative Research.

7.1 Introduction

During the second half of the twentieth century, oral history research traditions became increasingly significant for qualitative researchers (Abrams, 2010; Perks & Thompson, 1998; Thompson, 2000; Vansina, 2006). This interest of qualitative researchers in oral history research started in North America as part of the broader biographical turn which emerged in the social sciences (see Blumer, 1939; Denzin, 1970), and gained ground as an exciting and fast-moving field in the rest of the world after the Second World War (Bertaux & Kohli, 1984; Roberts, 2002;Thompson, 2000). According to Thompson (2000), the rising popularity of oral history research stemmed from a growing interest in the social history of the working-class, based on an exploration of their biographies (see also Bertaux, 1981; Yow, 2015). By the 1980s, *"oral history had become the methodology of choice amongst scholars of the twentieth century seeking to uncover the experiences of a number of groups who had traditionally been disregarded by conventional histories"* (Abrams, 2010). As Roberts (2002) asserts, oral history research provides access to unique and specific insights, challenging 'traditional' history by opening up life experiences of those who are usually not heard. In that vein, Booth and Booth (1996, p. 55) postulate that biographical research methodologies, such as oral history research, provide access to the perspectives and experiences of people *"who lack the power to make their voices heard through traditional modes of academic discourse"*.

In that vein, a strand of oral history research attempts to uncover the life histories of children about their past, since their perspectives have been 'hidden from history' for a very long time (Perks & Thompson, 2004). It is, however, only recently that historians of childhood increasingly began to make use of the memoirs of adults as reliable and innovative sources of scientific knowledge (Fass, 2010). This recent popularity of oral history research for historians of childhood derives from the conviction that adults, who were involved in the social realities under study in the past as children, can be seen as privileged in bearing witness to history (Fass, 2010), and that we therefore must rely on their memoirs if we are eager to grapple with *"the details of history from those who participated in it"* (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 57). Several historians of childhood share, for example, the common belief that oral history research is very useful as an appropriate methodological approach to study the social realities of childhood institutions in the past (Søland, 2015). During the last years, we studied the history of three remaining orphanages in the city of Ghent (a city in Flanders, the Dutch speaking part of Belgium) by drawing on oral history research from forty formerly orphaned children and five ex-staff members. All the research subjects stayed or worked in a Ghent orphanage during the period from 1945 to 1984, when the last Ghent orphanage irrevocably closed its doors. As

retrospective narratives of childhood, the oral histories of both formerly orphaned boys and girls functioned as the central source in generating knowledge and research insights (De Wilde & Vanobbergen, 2015).

Remarkably, however, although our oral history research venture produced particular ethical challenges, complexities and dilemmas that were emerging during the research process, research ethics in the *doing* of oral history research are inadequately addressed in the existing body of research (see Jessee, 2011). Although researchers have paid considerable attention to important *procedural* ethical issues (see Roberts, 2002), we argue that there is currently a lack of attention for *situational* research ethics in the doing of oral history. As Ritchie (2015, p. xv) asserts quite recently, for oral history researchers it is of vital importance that they realise that there is no cookbook of recipes or a uniform way of doing oral history, and that we shouldn't *"seek to make all interviewers march like soldiers in cadence"*. In this chapter, we address and discuss particular ethical challenges that we experienced while constructing the life histories of the former orphans, but also in the interpretation and representation of our research insights. In our research project, rather surprisingly, the former orphans started to act and position themselves as research *participants* rather than as passive sources of information being approached as merely respondents or informants. In a sense, the ways in which the formerly orphaned children showered us with a diversity of pertinent questions, while jointly constructing their life histories, set the tone for the research relationship, but also for the ways in which their life histories were interpreted and represented. Their stories and questions enabled us to discover the political nature of research ethics (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Goodwin, Pope, Mort & Smith, 2003), and prompted us to engage in an interactive methodology while going public (see Ritchie, 2001) in providing a 'questionable' historical interpretation in the present for the controversial issue of what happened in childhood institutions in the recent past.

In what follows, we first address what can be considered procedural and situational research ethics in qualitative research, and refine the implications of these notions of research ethics in the case of oral history research. Second, we discuss the challenges in the construction process of our oral history research venture. Third, we argue that the questions of the research subjects enabled us to discover the political nature of research ethics in oral history. Fourthly, we address how the politics of interpretation of our research venture was understood as a practice of storytelling rather than truth-telling. Finally, we discuss the complexities of our enacted politics of representation in going public.

7.2 Different notions of research ethics

In the existing body of qualitative research, researchers have stressed the importance of what has been called *situational research ethics* (Ellis, 2007; Goodwin, Pope, Mort & Smith, 2003; Punch, 1998; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Wiles, Charles, Crow & Heath, 2006). As Goodwin, Pope, Mort & Smith (2003, p. 567) articulate, there seems to be an acknowledgement amongst qualitative researchers that there are *"dilemmas that develop unexpectedly and spontaneously, perhaps in situations where the researcher has little control over events"*. In that light, Guillemin and Gillam (2004, p.262) describe situational research ethics as *"the difficult, often subtle, and usually unpredictable situations that arise in the practice of doing research"*. Situational research ethics are accordingly perceived as *ethics in practice*, that deal with often complicated, context-specific and surprising issues that come up in the field (Ellis, 2007; Wiles, Charles, Crow & Heath, 2006). According to these researchers, situational research ethics are an accepted and almost obligatory feature of fieldwork, *"where the researcher is but one element in a complex and dynamic research setting"* (Goodwin, Pope, Mort & Smith, 2003, p. 567).

The position taken by these qualitative researchers is situated as a necessary addition to *procedural research ethics*, that are often given a rather unconditional credit in many academic contexts worldwide (Goodwin Pope, Mort & Smith, 2003; Wiles, Charles, Crow & Heath, 2006; Ellis, 2007). Procedural research ethics provide professional codes and modes of ethics that serve as moral principles for researchers to deal adequately, for example, *"with informed consent, confidentiality, rights to privacy, deception and protecting human subjects from harm"* (Ellis, 2007, p. 4). Also in the realm of oral history research, there are plenty of internet or paper manuals available to enable researchers in the development of an oral history project (see Hunt, 2003; Moyer, 1993). This is, for example, reflected in publications such as *Voiced past: oral history and practice: object, method, application* (De Wever & Francois, 2002), in which the search for witnesses, and the method of transcribing and retaining the interviews is broadly discussed. Another example is the extensive work *The Oral History Reader* (Perks & Thomson, 1998), in which much attention is paid to the different kinds of interview techniques and analysis, and the suggestion of drafting an 'informed consent' is consistently made. In the same vein, Roberts (2002, p. 104) asserts that *"oral historians have paid considerable attention to important ethical and legal issues surrounding informed consent, confidentiality and access to archive research. These complex areas are commonly raised in practical research texts, archive guidelines and by professional bodies and journals"*. Also in our university, an Ethical Commission requires that researchers apply for approval of their research project and the research methods that will be used. This is also reflected in the commission of the protection of privacy, which is stating that this entails the insurance *"that personal data are handled with care and thoroughly protected and*

that your future privacy also remains guaranteed" (http://www.privacycommission.be).

Many researchers, nevertheless, have stressed the shortcomings and inappropriateness of these ethical norms and standards that are generated externally to the research process and function as controlling mechanisms in the process of knowledge production (Ellis, 2007; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Koro-Ljunberg, Gemignani, Winton, Brodeur & Kmiec 2007; Patterson, 2008). As Patterson (2008, p. 25) aptly argues, *"the nature of ethics is obscured if exclusive or even primary attention is paid to rules and principles"*. In contrast to these procedural ethics, situational research ethics consider ethical dilemmas and concerns as an inherent part of the everyday practice of doing research, implying a *"question of knowing and thinking as well as of choosing and everyday action"* (Scott, 1990, p. 5). In this approach, unexpected elements can be taken into account while performing research, and ethical choices can be made while encompassing situational dilemmas and complexities (Goodwin, Pope, Mort & Smith, 2003). According to Wiles, Charles, Crow & Heath (2006, p. 284), social researchers therefore adopt a situational approach *"in which ethical decisions are made on the basis of their own ethical and moral standpoint and the issues applicable to individual research projects"*. Interestingly, Ellis (2007) adds a more specific dimension to situational research ethics which she calls *relational ethics*, relating the idea of ethics in practice to the inner dynamics of research, such that research values *"mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched"* (Ellis, 2007, p. 4). In the same vein, Guillemin and Gillman (2004, p. 264) refer to *"the ethical obligations of a researcher toward a research participant in terms of interacting with him or her in a humane, non-exploitative way while at the same time being mindful of one's role as a researcher"*. Also in oral history research, this issue of relational research ethics is highly relevant. The oral historian's intervention can raise difficulties for the interviewee and ethical dilemmas for the researcher *"surrounding the inequalities of the oral history interview relation, the hierarchical nature of interpretation, and possibilities for exploitation"* (Roberts, 2002, p. 104). As Reinharz (1992, p. 132) asserts, oral history *"has the benefits and problems of direct personal contact with the researched"*.

7.3 Oral history research with former orphans: a shower of stories and questions

In our research venture, particular situational and relational ethical challenges can and should be addressed. The main challenge concerned the question whether the so-called 'research respondents' in oral history should be considered as passive research objects rather than as active research subjects, and what implications this entails for the role and position of the researcher(s) (Roberts, 2002). As Ritchie (1995, p. 10)

argues, due to the implications different terms may carry, *"some oral historians dislike 'interviewee' for its passive sound and have searched for a more active designation, like 'informants', 'respondents', 'oral author' and 'narrator'"*. Also Bleyen (2008) suggests that it matters how research respondents in oral history research are labelled and approached, and emphasises that they are preferably called *storytellers* instead of respondents, witnesses or informants. In our research project, however, rather surprisingly, the former orphans started to act and position themselves as research *participants* rather than as passive sources of information being approached as respondents or informants. In that sense, we struggled with the surprising complexities of the oral history research venture, as the ways in which the formerly orphaned children showered us with a diversity of pertinent questions, while jointly constructing their life histories, set the tone for the research relationship.

During the in-depth interviews that served to make a compilation of their life histories, many of the former orphans mentioned that, in the present, people in society have no idea of what happened to them all those years ago. They stressed that growing up in these times was very different than now, and that they were raised the hard way in the Ghent orphanages. Many former orphans expressed, for example, complaints and accusations with reference to child abuse, ranging from physical violence and emotional blackmail to inappropriate sexual behaviour. However, many of the life histories also reflected positive experiences of the former orphans, who stressed that their residence and upbringing in the orphanages also gave them the opportunity to grow up with other children and to learn many things, such as learning a profession. As a result, it was clear that the former orphans disagree about *what happened there* and how the Ghent orphanages should be remembered. Many oral history research ventures, however, are currently based on the assumption that one should turn to memory in order to reveal 'what really happened' (Hodgkin, 2005) by relying on sources 'from the inside'. Our case study on the Ghent orphanages, nevertheless, shows that the biographical accounts of the former orphans reflect strong similarities but equally well a true struggle about their 'collective past'. This struggle embodies a fierce disagreement and even conflict about 'how it was' and how the Ghent orphanages should be remembered. This expectation of filtering out a common historical narrative entailed complexity for us as researchers, since the former orphans compelled respect from us for the ambiguities and contradictions in their accounts of the past which made it impossible to reach a consensus of 'what really happened'. An example is the labelling of the orphans, which is an ambiguous and complicated issue since the former orphans ascribed different roles and identities to themselves. One of these roles, for example, refers to being a 'victim'. The former orphans did not by definition refer to themselves as 'victims'. However this is not related to what happened within the orphanage, but to the fact that they were never labelled as an orphan when they were admitted to the orphanage as a result of their familial circumstances. As one of the former orphans expressed:

> *"Of course, as a child, you are the victim. It was actually my mother who had quarrels with my father, but we were the victims. […] Come on, it wasn't our fault that we were placed there. We have been ashamed and casted out. […] I'm beginning to realise that we are the victims. They always made that very clear at Prince Filip [Ghent orphanage 1962-1984], we were nothing, so they told us that we should be very happy to be there because neither our mother nor father wanted us."*

Nevertheless, the majority of our respondents rejected the idea of being a victim, because they refused to be seen as a passive actor in their life story rather than softening and not denouncing certain practices or experiences. In that sense, any kind of public statement now being made by oral history researchers can potentially associate them as research subjects unknowingly or against their will with 'a version' of their past that is incoherent with their experiences. In our study, we therefore considered their memories as narratives of meaning rather than events (Portelli, 2012).

As a running thread throughout the recollection of the narratives of the former orphans, they also started to raise many questions about *why this happened to them*. For example, the question why they were placed in the orphanages anyway was a recurrent question of the orphans. Furthermore, they struggled with questions such as: why were they ever admitted to the orphanage? Why was it impossible to stay together with their brothers and sisters, or with their grandparents? Why did they deserve such treatment? Why did some children in the orphanage experience so much misery? Why couldn't they stay at home after a visit on Sunday? It was clear that they were, and still are, kept in the dark about many essential aspects and details of their life history. For example, they experienced a lack of knowledge about their original family composition, the reasons for their admittance, the date of entry and duration of their stay in the orphanage, among others.

Moreover, these events in their pasts were also clearly inextricably connected with their current life and its wider social and political context in the present (see Roberts, 2002). In that sense, many former orphans seemed to be entangled in a life-long struggle with their mixture of feelings, interpretations and memories of what happened in the orphanage and in their childhood. With reference to their experiences of child abuse, many of them expressed a quest for recognition. Some of the former orphans also revealed the name(s) and (former) function (in some cases even the address) of the persons who hurt them in the orphanage, saying that otherwise we would sweep the truth under the carpet or gloss over the past. Other former orphans, however, also addressed that they fostered many positive memories, and even asked about the contact details of other former orphans who participated in the research project to enable the sharing and discussing of their memories.

Moreover, they clearly framed their uncovered experiences in relation to evolving developments in their respective social and political context. One of them, for example, raised a sharp critique

> *"Take for instance the case of the Brothers, it happened, it happened, it happened to us too. Why can they [the victims of sexual abuse by members of the Catholic Church in Belgium] tell their story while we cannot? And why do we have to keep silent about what happened to us as a child? Our youth has been destroyed too…"*

This quote embodies this quest for recognition, and refers to 'Operatie Kelk' (Operation Cup of Sorrow), a criminal justice inquiry into historical abuse of children by members of the Catholic Church in Belgium. At the time of our interviews with former orphans, an attempt was made by the Belgian Court of Justice to obtain the files and testimonies of the victims of abuse. This criminal justice inquiry, only recently finished in 2014, aimed to ascertain whether religious leaders of the Belgian Catholic Church were liable to punishment for their attempts to sweep the sexual abuse of children by religious persons in positions of trust under the carpet (The Editorial Office, 2014). In 2014, the Flemish Parliament also issued a formal apology after an investigation of the alleged historical abuse of children in publicly funded welfare and educational institutions (see Final Report *An unambiguous choice for recognition: historical violence and abuse in child welfare and educational public services in Flanders*, 2013), addressed all the victims of historical violence and abuse in Flemish child welfare and educational institutions in the period from 1930 to 1990 (see Open Letter of the Flemish Parliament, April 22 2014). The Flemish Parliament expressed its well-intended aim to *"prevent, and if necessary proceed against, violence and abuse with respect to children and youngsters"* (Open Letter of the Flemish Parliament, April 22 2014). Different former orphans, for example, also expressed their hope that the research project would offer some kind of recognition for them in the present as well. During the research process, they also uncovered that they could continue to keep the memory of the Ghent orphanages alive, as they set up Facebook groups and the former orphan league, and organised a quarterly journal and many different reunions. In that vein, many former orphans raised the idea during the research process to demand some kind of commemoration symbol. Suggestions of a statue, a commemoration plague, a permanent exhibition or a historical book of reference were frequently made. In this context, as researchers, we realised that we couldn't interpret and represent 'the history' of the Ghent orphanages as a closed chapter in the past.

7.4 Discovering the political nature of research ethics

Therefore, it can be argued that oral history researchers need to pay attention to the external dynamics of an evolving research project, since research evolves as an activity that cannot distance itself from historical, social, and political processes, evolutions and contexts (Roets & Goedgeluck, 2007; Vandekinderen, Roets & Van Hove, 2014). As Denzin and Lincoln (2008, pp. 29-30) argue, behind the research process is the biographically and *socially situated researcher*, which indicates the depth of complexity into which a researcher enters while being confronted with the situational and relational ethics and politics of research *"that apply to all forms of the research act"*. It appears then *"that ethical conduct is not fixed, but is personally, socially, and contextually constructed"* (Goodwin, Pope, Mort & Smith, 2003, p. 569). In that sense, oral history research cannot take place in a historical, social and political vacuum (Andreola, 1993; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). While researching the individual orphans' life experiences within their respective socio-historical contexts, these situational and relational research dynamics confronted us with the necessity of making political choices as oral history researchers. In the context of oral history research, Thomson et al. (1994, p. 35, quoted in Roberts, 2002, p. 104) also point to this dilemma between constructing histories which may be critical of the memories given and the *"duty to society and history"* to challenge powerful myths which dominate lives in the present. Could we possibly ignore the pertinent questions of the former orphans, or did we have to do justice to their quest for recognition in the present?

As D'Cruz and Jones (2004, p. 9) argue, it is important to understand what has been called the political dimension of generating knowledge, which requires that we *"think about what assumptions about the world are taken for granted and what questions and answers are not addressed or precluded by particular pieces of research or particular research designs"*. Also Levering (2010) asserts that such choices in constructing research in relations of power should be legitimised and openly discussed in qualitative research ventures, yet the considerations in making such choices are less frequently discussed (Roets, Roose & Bouverne-De Bie, 2013). However, Goodwin, Pope, Mort & Smith (2003, p. 568) argue for an approach that recognises the situated and located character of research, *"that accounts for the position and context from which the researcher speaks (…) presently researchers are encouraged to get the moral issues 'on the table'* (Wolcott, 1995, p. 123)*, to reveal the 'hidden from view' areas of research"*. This emphasis on the political choices made by researchers during the research process is also relevant in the case of oral history research: *"oral historians should make apparent their own motivations and interests and make (…) their own strategies and biases visible"* (Roberts, 2002, p. 106).

This position created particular dilemmas about our politics of interpretation and representation, since it seemed impossible to keep the ambiguity of possible interpretations to a minimum and we wanted to open up these insights for public debate (see Ritchie, 2001). In the next section, we identify and discuss our chosen path in dealing with this appeal in our politics of interpretation and representation.

7.5 The politics of interpretation: truth-telling or storytelling?

In an attempt to do justice to the singularity, ambiguity and complexity of the stories and experiences of the former residents of the orphanages and to render them recognition, our research venture had to mean something different than determining and distinguishing 'the historical truth' (Ignatieff, 1996). In our research venture, the inconsistencies and ambiguities in the diversity of life histories of the former orphans were striking and confronted us with the question of how to interpret and represent their stories rather than assuming one coherent or so-called 'true' story about the past. The role of the oral history researcher is quite salient in these issues, for example, as the voices of the researched are 'mediated' (edited, interpreted, contextualised) by the researcher (Roberts, 2002).

It is, however, stale news that oral history research struggles with the question of how people's experiences of the past should be interpreted and represented in relation to the nature of this reconstructed social reality (Bleyen, 2008). This issue refers to a key debate that lingers on within the broader biographical turn, crystallising in a 'realist' versus a 'constructionist' standpoint (Denzin, 1997; Roberts, 2002). Whereas realists assert that they are in the pursuit of an objective knowledge and reconstruction of reality as an empirical truth, constructionists argue that this standpoint is a simplistic and misconceived 'biographical illusion' (Denzin, 1997) since *"both the respondents' 'story' and its interpretation by the researcher are shaped"* during the research process (Roberts, 2002, p. 7). Rather than representing a so-called 'objective reality' (Richardson, 1995), constructionists place a special emphasis on the subjective construction process in research, taking *"the standpoint that 'reality' is malleable and multiple and a focus upon social aspects of the interaction between the interviewee and interviewer"* is necessary (Miller, 2000, p. 130).

Also in oral history research traditions, this question concerning 'the truth' and the role of the researcher in interpreting and representing oral accounts has been raised and the standpoint taken was that *"the study of popular memory can begin only where empiricist and positivist norms break down"* (Roberts, 2002, p. 106). For Bornat (quoted in Roberts, 2002, p. 105), oral history has shifted from an 'obsessive concern' with truthfulness *"to a more 'relaxed attitude' which has allowed a focus on*

interpretation". Also Vansina (2006, pp. 183-184) asserts that *"history is always an interpretation (…) In addition, the historian adds something of his own to these facts, namely, his own particular flair, which is something more akin to art than to science. The only concession to history as a scientific discipline he can make here is to ensure that he discloses what his sources are, so that his readers will be informed as to the reasons for the choice he had made in his interpretations of the texts"*. Oral historian Alessandro Portelli (quoted in Yow, 2015, p. 24) reminds us that the *"importance of oral testimony may often lie not in its adherence to facts but rather in its divergence from them, where imagination, symbolism, desire break in"*. Therefore, *"there are no 'false' oral sources"* (Portelli, quoted in Roberts, 2002, p. 105). As such, the idea that oral historians can only interpret and represent collected life histories in noncommittal ways doesn't make sense; they often take a political standpoint. In that vein, the interpretation and accordingly representation of the life histories of former orphans can be seen as a political practice, when oral history practice is set within its wider academic and wider social, political, cultural and historical context of the present (Roberts, 2002). The complexity can arise more specifically in considerations such as how to write for an academic and public audience, and how to give history back to the people so that the experiences of the research subjects are given a legitimacy and a recognition.

7.6 The politics of representation: the complexities of going public

In a highly interesting and relevant article, *When history goes public: recent experiences in the United States*, Donald Ritchie (2001) observes that historians have descended from the ivory tower to involve themselves in public debate while seeking to address broader audiences on broader issues. In his critical analysis, he argues that academic historians who act as public intellectuals are called upon to provide historical interpretations for controversial issues in the public sphere, whereas so-called public historians who work in terms of non-academic interests *"have tended to avoid taking sides in current politics and have concentrated instead on presenting the past in more accessible formats and public ventures"* (Ritchie, 2001, p. 92). As both positions have come under fire, the crucial insight he brings to the table is that historians (either academic or public) shouldn't tell the public only what it wants to hear but that the major challenge is to make the past relevant for the present. As such, he emphasises that particularly oral historians *"have benefitted from a truly interactive methodology, from which they have learned to listen to conflicting opinions and to incorporate multiple viewpoints into their public presentations"* (Ritchie, 2001, p. 92).

In an attempt to represent the complexity of the history of the orphanages, we launched an interactive exhibition and a book with the aim to give the history of the Ghent orphanages back to the former orphans who participated in the research project, as well as to a wider audience.

Based on our research insights, we staged an interactive exhibition in 2011 entitled *'Open secret: diary of an orphan'* ('Publiek geheim: dagboek van een weeskind'), in collaboration with the archive of the Bureau of Social Welfare and with the support of the Department of Education of the city of Ghent. This exhibition was initially set up for the fifth grade of all elementary schools in the city. As the former orphans repeatedly mentioned, in the present, nobody knows anymore what happened in the orphanages, particularly with reference to young people nowadays, we started to think about a way to represent the history of the Ghent orphanages to a wider audience of citizens of Ghent. The interactive exposition ran from March to May 2011 and was repeated during six weeks in the fall of that year. At the end, the exhibition was visited by fifty-five class groups. All visitors were guided through the different parts of the exhibition by us or by members of staff of the archive. Every child got an 'exercise book' in the form of a diary, in which all assignments and guidelines for the children were clustered. They were invited to walk through the exhibition while following the life story of a twelve year-old girl, 'Emma', and her younger brother. They tell the story of an orphan boy and girl who resided in an orphanage in Ghent during the 50s and 60s of the last century, since their parents got divorced and they could no longer live at home. At the end of every walk through the exhibition, the issue of out-of-home care was raised in a discussion group with the children, with the aim to situate this in a contemporary and (inter)national perspective. As a result of these discussions, we noticed that the children were enabled to make connections with the experiences of the former orphans, and to reflect on what they had just seen and heard. In that vein, all the children went home with their 'own' diary in which they could write down their thoughts, reflections and questions. Later on, the exhibition was made suitable and adjusted to make an appeal to an adult audience. For example, more visual material such as photos, video recordings and written historical documents were added. Moreover, a large canvas with all the names of the children who were ever admitted to a Ghent orphanage after the Second World War was represented. We reopened the exhibition on the national heritage day of 2011 in the presence of former orphans who participated in our oral history research project. We also invited former orphans who did not want to participate in the project. An additional goal of this gathering was to exchange with the former orphans and to collect photographs. The former orphans could order all of the photo material that was used in the exhibition. The former residents of the orphanage were also invited to bring along their own photos for the archive to make an inventory of all the pictures that were in their possession. Later on, we offered fellow former orphans the opportunity to order their preferred photographs.

A year later, we tried to cater for a broad public with a book entitled '*Can I tell this? Voices from the Ghent orphanages* (1945-1984)' ('Mag ik dit vertellen? Stemmen uit de Gentse weeshuizen (1945-1984)) that was published in 2012 by ACCO. We envisioned accessibility of the book for a broad audience, and all the participants of our oral history research project received a copy of it. The intention of this book was to shed light on the case of the Ghent orphan houses in an attempt to represent the perspectives of the formerly institutionalised children that were often untouched in the past. At that moment in time, however, there was considerable attention in public debates and in the media for the alleged historical abuse perpetrated against children in public as well as private welfare services in Flanders, eventually leading to a public apology that was issued by the Flemish Parliament on the 22nd of April 2014. These so-called politics of apology, which have evolved during the last decades as a European and even global development (Brooks, 1999; Gibney, 2008), often follow on formal inquiries that are commissioned by national authorities (see also Ferguson, 2007; Garrett, 2010). In essence, the underlying public demand and provocation for these national inquiries usually implies a *"need to know the truth"* (Daly, 2014, p. 11), as this truth functions as the basis for the politics of apology in the quest of giving recognition to the victims of abuse while revealing 'what really happened' (Hodgkin, 2005). Rather than writing a book that provided clear answers and knowledge in relation to the emotionally charged and controversial history of the Ghent orphanages, however, we sought to unravel several tensions and ambiguities inherent to the history of the particular educational sites of the Ghent orphanages. In our approach, as academic historians, we acknowledged that *"interpretation should be attentive to inconsistency and ambiguities in stories rather than assuming one story and a simple receptiveness of the audience"* (Roberts, 2002, p. 7). While taking a stance, we positioned our politics of representation in sharp contrast with the 'truth logic' of these formal inquiries. We were in search of ways to capture and incorporate the ambiguities in the life histories of the former orphans, in which positive as well as negative memories are articulated, with the intent to open up public dialogue, so that it becomes possible for historical researchers to contribute to the quest for social justice of contemporary societies (Bos, 2010). In that sense, we did not write this book with the intention to meet the frequently asked question whether orphanages should be considered as good or bad initiatives.

Therefore, it can be argued that oral history researchers are also confronted with notable complexities while going public. Although we first hesitated in raising a multiplicity of interpretative repertoires, as this implies a risk of getting lost in translation with the audience while interpreting and representing layered and ambiguous findings, we tried to hold a mirror in front of the past of the audience. By taking a stance and going public with our interpretations of these childhood histories, however, we got the impression that the formerly orphaned children, and other visitors or readers, turned the mirror and put it in front of us by giving us feedback on

the internet or at the opening by writing a message in our guestbook. As the audience actively interpreted our representations in their own way, we started to embrace this ambiguity in interpreting and representing the research findings as a multiplicity of interpretable issues to different audiences as an opportunity (see Roets, Roose & Bouverne-De Bie, 2013). In our experience, these reactions and comments upon visiting the exposition or reading the book add a valuable dimension to our research in providing an opportunity to initiate public debate about rather controversial issues in the past that are projected in the realm of the symbolic imaginary in the present (see also Bevernage, 2008).

7.7 Concluding reflections

In our oral history research project, we discovered that discussing different dimensions of research ethics does matter. While embracing the value of insights emerging from situational research ethics in the doing of oral history, we were challenged to take an ethical and political stance in the enactment of our politics of interpretation and representation of the research findings as well. This broad interpretation of research ethics is also stressed by Goodwin, Pope, Mort & Smith (2003, p. 567), who argue that ethics implies *"an ever-present concern for all researchers; it pervades every aspect of the research process from conception and design through to research practice, and continues to require consideration during dissemination of the results"*. The surprising shower of stories and questions of the research subjects in our oral history research project also enabled us to discover the political nature of research ethics, and prompted us to engage in an interactive methodology while going public (see Ritchie, 2001). We follow Ritchie's (2001, p. 93) main assertion that oral historians should use their skills subtly in efforts to shape public consciousness through the presentation of the past in public places; *"seeking to return history to the communities that made it, and to help average people grow more aware of their own role in the broader scope of history"* while embracing the possibility of conflicts and controversy over historical interpretations. In that vein, the historical researcher can question the obviousness of institutional problem constructions through which people learn to accept social injustice, by which the 'unquestioned' becomes 'questionable' (Schuyt, 1972). This implies that knowledge claims resulting from oral history research can be presented as questionable issues rather than neutral facts to stimulate a process of humanisation (Schuyt, 1972), which can be read in multiple ways by the different actors involved. In that sense, also Lather (2009) argues for dialogical representational practices that reside in contradictory and constantly shifting and changing interpretations, since (new) meaning can come into existence in participative and dialogical processes of interpretation between the researcher, the research subjects, and the audience.

7.8 References

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Chapter 8

General conclusion

8.1 General discussion

A painting needs
a wall to object to,
an image needs
a text to protect it,
and every text needs
someone to decode it.

(Marlene Dumas, 2009)

Looking back on our research process, we can conclude that it has led us towards unfamiliar roads we could have never mapped out in advance. Our interest in the concept 'children at risk' and the history of childhood has brought us to the last orphanages of the city of Ghent. Our archival and oral history research made it possible to (re)construct the last chapter of the history of this particular educational context. The document analyses as well as the narratives from our participants have pointed us in many different directions - of which we have chosen certain paths to walk. The various research questions we came across were traced back to existing international literature and contemporary (policy) debates. We examined these questions and addressed them in the previous chapters. In the first part of this general conclusion we summarise what the different chapters of this doctoral dissertation have taught us.

In addition, the second part of this final chapter reviews the findings of our research in relation to the question of *why* it is interesting to examine the history of these kinds of institutions, as one often wonders if, what and how we can learn from the past. We first examine the meaning of our research for the field of historical (educational) research. Second, we explore the possible meanings of our findings for the current discussion about the 'politics of apology'. In the end we will go *back to the future* by paying attention to the significance of our research for the children at risk discourse of today.

8.1.1 Main conclusions

In the introductory chapter of this dissertation we gave an overview of what was considered, from a historical point of view, as the child at risk. We started this dissertation with the observation that during the 19th and 20th century very specific and ever-changing interventions were designed for various categories of at-risk children. Orphaned children are one of the pre-eminently groups within this broad category. Orphans and their history have been studied worldwide. We turned our gaze towards the case of the Ghent orphanages after the Second World War. As was

clarified in the introduction of this dissertation we divided our research questions into two parts. The first part of this doctoral dissertation covered the first four research questions, which mainly focus on what we have called (in chapter 2) the 'orphan-discourse'.

In chapter 2 we specifically analysed what kind of child appeared in the history of the Ghent orphanages. We have shown that the orphaned children of Ghent were constructed as children at risk, primarily due to an alleged hazardous familial environment. These children were labelled as orphans even though a large percent of them still had one or two parents alive at the time of their admission. This made us decide to preferably speak of 'becoming an orphan' instead of 'being an orphan'. Many parents or family members played some kind of role in the lives of the orphaned children. However, the label 'orphan' immediately implied that these children had no parents or other family members to rely on. Parents were constructed as 'absent' or 'abusive', making it impossible to be the primary caregiver for their child. The grounds for the children's admittance in a Ghent orphanage were found in their family background. In this way, the label 'orphan' told us more about the parents of the children, than about the status or situation of the orphaned child itself. In fact, the original background of the children was erased and the parents were made invisible (Murdoch, 2006). Once the parents disappeared, it became possible to start over again. We consequently argued that the label 'orphan' serves as a legitimation of the government intervention as such. In this, 'the orphan' was considered as a blank sheet. Also, it explains the construction of the orphanage as an island, a place with a focus on discipline, hygiene and uniformity.

The children in the orphanages were considered to be at risk and had to be saved from their pernicious families in order to avoid future danger. Offering them an alternative education in the Ghent orphanages was seen as an appropriate answer. In chapter 3 we studied the discussions, decisions and aspirations of the Bureau of Social Welfare regarding the policy of the Ghent orphanages. During several decennia there have been long debates on how to organise out-of-home care for the alleged homeless children. As we have shown, the underlying pedagogical mission still remained as it was: '*educating the children into useful members of society*'. Also the 'renewed' orphanage 'Prince Filip' was considered an important instrument to serve these ambitions.Even though the population of the orphanages had changed, the local authorities continued to use the name 'orphanage'. This ascertainment made our gaze shift towards to the role and the functions of these institutions within the broader community of the city of Ghent. The orphaned children of the city of Ghent were (and still are) considered to be 'kulders', poor orphans and parentless children by themselves, the Bureau of Social Welfare and society. In that vein, we argued that concepts such as 'orphans' and 'orphanages' did not only refer to the classification of certain groups of children, but were also techniques to protect the social order.

In the process of contextualising this government intervention in time and space, we conducted 45 interviews with both former orphans and former staff members of the orphanages of the city of Ghent. The second part of our research project covered the four other research questions, each attempting to address various calls of our oral history participants. We translated and divided these 'quests' into four research questions. First, a presence of the past was researched within a quest for recognition. The pertinent quest for recognition throughout the interviews with the former residents of the Ghent orphanages made us unravel what this quest precisely entailed. More than 25 years after the last urban orphan house closed its doors, the history of these institutions takes multiple different shapes through various channels and groupings (e.g. Facebook groups, Former Orphan League). These sites have shown the disagreements and conflicts between the former orphans about 'how it was' and how the Ghent orphanages should be remembered. Chapter 4 of this dissertation has taught us that the histories of the Ghent orphanages therefore cannot be considered as a closed chapter, at least as long as the former orphans keep this history alive. Hence, the title of this dissertation refers to these research insights as we have framed the history of the Ghent orphanages as a 'never ending contested space'.

Chapter 4 revealed that recognition in the context of the history of residential care should be something different than determining and distinguishing 'the truth' about the past. Therefore we seized the opportunity to reflect and break open some pervasive concepts within the current logic of the politics of apology in chapter 5. In other words, we situated and analysed the quest for recognition in a broader perspective. This research question dealt with the role Western welfare states play, when being confronted with a plea for more recognition. The number of governmental apologies elevated since the turn of the 21th century. They are presented as an attempt to come to terms with the failure of social welfare policies in a painful past and to repair human injustices. We mainly scrutinised and critiqued the underlying 'truth logic' of the politics of apology, offered by the state in their quest for social justice. Furthermore, to figure out 'the truth' ('what did really happen?'), these researches are exclusively based on the memory of former residents of welfare state institutions. Childhood memories [of traumatic experiences] are in this way perceived as 'carriers of the truth' about the past (see Sköld, 2013). Chapter 5 has shown that this worldwide celebration of 'the truth' is no more than an illusion because the inquiries into historical abuse undoubtedly hold a strong normative perspective.

We concluded that the authorised researchers do not reveal 'the truth', but only 'a truth', uncovering storied versions of realities evolving in the past. Our plea in chapter 5 suggests that such an official, public apology should never have the intent of marking the end of a discussion - on the contrary, it can only generate discussions on how individual as well as collective recognition can be offered regarding a historical injustice. Furthermore, historical researchers can play an important role in giving

individual as well as collective recognition. The historical researcher can question the obviousness of institutional problem constructions through which people learn to accept social injustice. In doing so the 'unquestioned' becomes 'questionable' (Schuyt, 1972). Raising a multiplicity of interpretative repertoires by giving the past a place in the present through various ways is pivotal in the quest for social justice.

We addressed the 'issue of going public' more profoundly in chapter 7. In that chapter the focus was on the methodological and analytical complexity of doing (oral history) research with former residents of orphanages. When we looked back on the process of data collection and the research process it became clear that the experience in itself raised considerable dilemmas and issues with an ethical dimension. We addressed particular ethical challenges of what we have called *situational research ethics* that we experienced while reconstructing the history of the three remaining orphanages. In this chapter we have explored and discovered the political nature of research ethics through stories and questions of our oral history research project.We engaged in an interactive methodology in our attempt of 'going public' by organising an interactive exhibition and writing a book for a broad public.

In the second part of this doctoral dissertation we have argued that it is impossible to evaluate the past in an objective and neutral manner. The research question in chapter 6, entailing the quest for a personal history, referred to the fact that the former orphans missed and still miss a personal history. We have analysed this quest for a personal history by exploring the different meanings of the personal file. We discussed that the former orphans of Ghent see great value in retrospectively consulting their personal file at the archive of the Public Centre for Social Welfare. However, it turned out to be rather difficult to simply perceive this kind of file as 'the key to the past' for the former orphans. We concluded that the puzzling in some way never ends. Hence, we argued that personal files in the context of residential care are too often solely perceived as parts of the past. We have to be aware that they are part of today and the future too. In that vein, the current debate concerning historical files should take on the notion of accessibility from this perspective and go beyond it.

8.1.2 Concluding reflections

8.1.2.1 History of childhood

"If childhood is not a stage in life - neither a natural state nor a matter of age – but a basic component of personhood devised as a totality, then it is worth considering that childhood is a figure of life, a nomadic and mobile figure, continuously re-emergent, outlined and moulded in a given culture; that is to say that the figure varies in time and space accordingly."

(Turmel, 2008, p. 32)

This dissertation aimed at the outset to contribute to the field of the history of childhood by examining a particular educational case. One of our main research conclusions entailed the idea that the history of the Ghent orphanages cannot be seen as a closed chapter. Up until today the former orphans pose pertinent questions about the existence and the policies of the Ghent orphanages and often express their dissatisfaction of 'the harm that was done to them'. We noticed that the past is still very much present in the lives of the former orphans, both individually and collectively. The past is object of permanent evaluation and reflection. Therefore, it is essential to approach the past and the present not in terms of distinctive notions, but rather as interwoven concepts.

This presence of the past idea is closely linked to the confusion of our respondents when evaluating their own past. Their memories of the past are highly influenced by their life story, contemporary frames of reference and recent views on, for example, youth care. The narratives of our oral history research have shown that most of the former orphans and former staff do not make an unambiguous statement about whether the orphanage was good or bad. In this vein, we hold a strong plea to go beyond an evaluation of residential institutions in terms of good or bad. We therefore analysed our data by framing the history of the Ghent orphan houses through the process of *educationalisation* and its different educational paradoxes. The different paradoxes do not stand apart from each other, but function as different 'glasses' to examine the research material from (slightly) different perspectives.

In our view, orphan houses are therefore neither good nor bad, but can rather be considered as paradoxical sites. In the case of the Ghent orphans just about all interviews illustrated the mixed and even paradoxical feelings concerning their time in the orphanage. They are grateful for what they have received, while displeased for what they (potentially) have missed. This characterises the arduous struggle of many former orphans. However, recent interest in the 'history of childhood' by broader society and policy makers gave rise to the idea that the history of residential care (e.g. orphan care) can be reduced to a history of misery and abuse. Today, a rather dark picture of childhood in the past is painted. As Søland (2015, p. 35) asserts in her research on American Orphanages (1920-1970): *"In general, then, orphanage care is remembered as a dark chapter in the history of care for dependent children […] Rather than places of refuge, orphanages are remembered as places from which children ought to have been rescued"*. As we have argued in chapter 5 so-called 'good stories' are often not included in the history of childhood. Historical educational research can counterbalance this one-dimensional perspective in underlining the danger of evaluating the history of residential care for children in an a-historical way. In our opinion, a lot has to do with the initial research questions or perspectives of the historical research. For example, including the perspective of other 'witnesses' of the

past, such as members of staff, broadens the stories of the past in such a way that a sole condemnation of each staff member seems untenable.

It is essential not to reduce historical research to a tool to learn from the past. Historical research of educational practices cannot merely be seen as only the first chapter of any educational research/welfare study. It much more serves as a research perspective to unravel the paradoxes within a particular case-study. For example, when researching youth care policy, it becomes possible to study the history of a particular educational site (e.g. the Ghent orphanages) by uncovering inherent fields of tensions. In other words, in the past certain 'answers' were given to tackle a variety of at-risk children (and their parents). Historical educational research focuses on these answers. It is crucial to see that most of these fields of tension do not dissolve when time goes by, since they are inherent to the nature of education. The answers given by society however do differ. Historical educational research looks into educational and societal problems *and* analyses the answers given by society. It does not aim to dissolve these fields of tension but gains insight in how, in a certain time and in a certain period, we tried to deal with them.

8.1.2.2 The act of apologising

"Apologies defy easy analysis given political, moral & cultural complexities, but the growing interest in the public expression of apology and the increasing frequency, scope & range- and effectiveness- of its use argues, persuasively that we get to know a good deal more about it."

(Stamato, 2008, p. 396).

'Sorry seems to be the hardest word' Elton John sang in 1976. At least the message of the song appears to be outmoded anno 2015 since we currently live in an 'age of apology', as Brooks already foretold in 1999. At the time of our research 'Operatie Kelk' (Operation Cup of Sorrow), a criminal justice inquiry into historical abuse of children by members of the Catholic Church in Belgium, was carried out. Later on, in 2013, the Flemish Minister of Welfare, Public Health and Family Affairs, Jo Vandeurzen commissioned a panel of experts, to investigate the alleged historical abuse of children in publicly funded welfare and educational institutions. This resulted in April 2014 in a formal apology issued by the Flemish Parliament. Today, the same Minister has put together a commission to handle the matter of so-called 'forced adoptions' in the past. A growing body of opinion supports the idea of undertaking the same steps towards an official apology for the field of past psychiatric treatments.

The number of governmental apologies worldwide has only continued to increase since the turn of the 21th century in the quest for giving recognition to the victims of abuse. In this way, government interventions of the past still play an important role in

current policy making. However, what is the value of all those apologies? We consider this question highly relevant in the context of governmental apologies. Without denouncing the possible value of an official apology for a group of people claiming to be unjustly treated in the past, we consider it essential to look at the possible counter effects of this widespread Western practice. It is often not very clear what a government is actually recognising and apologising for. Or in other words, could the act of apology possibly cause more harm than good?

We have portrayed the quest for recognition in the context of residential care as a process, an uncompleted and ever going process. In this vein, an important role could be reserved for social policy makers and practitioners in current contexts of education, care and welfare. On the one hand, the history of institutions could, in collaboration with the adult care leavers, get a clear place in the current policy and daily operation. On the other hand, knowledge claims resulting from national inquiries can, besides a public apology, equally well be (re)presented and raised as questionable issues rather than neutral facts to stimulate a reflexive process of humanisation in our societies (Roets, Roose & Bouverne-De Bie, 2013). The essence of our argument points to the importance of relating the historical studies in the context of recognition and apologising with contemporary policy practices and issues. Western welfare states should seize this opportunity with both hands to generate and encourage a thorough reflection on contemporary (possibly abusive) practices and policies. In this vein, the quest for recognition could instigate a public dialogue and create a space to question contemporary practices. Only then a formal apology could possibly meet the ambition to be a symbol that communicates that 'society means business'. In present-day the act of apology is too often used or seen as the final piece of a public debate. In that case, saying sorry is not enough.

The underlying key question remains whether a public, official apology should merely lead to the implementation of methods of recognition for different groups of claimants and different forms of historical injustices. It seems to be a practice that simply never ends as the national research committees set a continuing apology trend in motion. If a government starts to apologise for practices of the past, the question of 'selectivity' arises. Which practices of the past require and deserve an apology and where does it end? In other words, which groups claiming their rights and acknowledgements for their past mistreatment are worth looking into and which are not. As we have argued in chapter 5, these official, public apologies are not neutral. The act of apologising undoubtedly holds a strong normative perspective. It tells us something about what a certain society considers as 'important' at a given time. More than that, the act of apology conveys what a society perceives as dangerous at a certain point. As we have pointed out in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, a risky situation in one society is not by definition considered a threat in another. For example, the Flemish Parliament has cast aside the motion to investigate the practice

of forced adoption twice in the past. In other words, the risk discourse alters in time and space. What we perceive as dangerous, as a threat or as a risky circumstance for children and youth does not 'constitute an ahistorical constant' (Lohmann & Mayer, 2009).

The overall Western act of apologising is in great need of thorough academic research. It all started with *"the idea that societies should redress injustices committed long ago"* (Wyman, 2008, p. 128), in the realm of the memory of the holocaust (Bos, 2010). However, nowadays the appointed commissions across the world are engaging in issues of a completely other nature than the Holocaust, genocides or ethnic cleansing from which this apology practice originated. In our view, research should not concentrate on how apologies should be issued, but on why governmental apologies are deemed necessary in the quest for social justice. In this regard, it seems rational to point towards the actual instrumental character of the governmental apologies. It doesn't seem to matter that much what the specific claims of the group of claimants entail. Once it is decided to take the appeal serious a process is started, which in essence does not alter that much. In other words, the quest for recognition is not taken seriously as the outcome of the research or expert commission principally leads to an official, public apology. This apologising trend at least gives the impression that certain chapters in history can be closed, in order to move forward. In light of our research conclusions the opposite ambition seems advisable.

8.1.2.3 Children at risk – government intervention

In this dissertation we focussed on the connection between the discourse on the child at risk and the different government interventions. We made clear how the concept of children at risk is related to a field of tension between the educational responsibility of the parents and the educational responsibility of the government. The construction of various categories of children at risk was described as important for the legitimisation of government interference. Despite the ambition to tackle all kinds of children at risk during the last centuries, the group of children at risk has not disappeared. On the contrary, the group of children considered to be at risk has remarkably increased. Today, we are faced with the more and more labels, more risky situations and more (governmental) interventions. The amount of 'at risk' categories expanded during the last decennia. At first, the focus was primarily on physical factors of children and youth, but the attention extended in the 60s and 70s of the last century to psychological features (Bakker, 2007, Turmel, 2008, Vanobbergen,). Jacobi (2009, p. 51) illustrates this tendency by referring to the American context:*"In 1997 the United States Bureau of Census issued a brief statement on "America's children at risk". This document defines "children at risk" as a group of children in US society who are affected by one or more of the following six factors: 'poverty', 'welfare dependence', 'absent parents', 'single-parent families', 'unwed mothers', and 'parents*

who did not graduate from high school'". Needless to say, according to this definition, nearly half of all 15-year-old Americans turn out to be 'children at risk'."

There have never been more children at risk than today. Dekker's conclusion that the 20th century can be seen as 'the century of the child at risk' seems to be carrying further in the 21th century. Dekker specifically points towards the International Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 as *"a major multiplier for the expansion of children at risk"* (2009, p. 9). According to him these rights often function *"as the juridical basic for broad and sometimes further expanding definitions of the maltreatment of children, with as an effect that the group of maltreated children is also expanding"* (Dekker, 2009, p. 33). Well over 20 years after the creation of this convention, Dekker (2012, p. 165) concludes that the ambition stands to safeguard the rights of children and intends to provide the best conditions for the development of all children. Within this ambition Dekker remarks that the attempt to protect children at risk on an international level has resulted in a loss of parental power and in a significant growth of power for the state and for the professionals.

During the 20th century the relationship between the government and parents clearly altered. Building upon the idea of the best interest of the child, the governmental power to interfere in the educational situation of children and their families has continued to rise.As a result the more and more children at risk entered residential care. A couple of years ago the government started questioning this tendency, especially referring to its high financial costs. New answers were developed. When we look at current policies in for instance Flanders, The Netherlands and the UK concerning youth care we stumble upon concepts that refer to a withdrawing state. In the UK the Big Government is replaced by the Big Society, in The Netherlands the participation society is the actual leading idea and in Flanders the government refers to the importance of what is called 'vermaatschappelijking van de zorg' (organise care within local social networks), also described as 'the strength of the commitment'. In Flanders for example, the very first objective of the recent *Decree on the legal status of minors in integrated youth care* entails a plea for 'vermaatschappelijking van de zorg'.This means that *"Youth workers must always question how they can make use of and strengthen the own forces of the minor, his parents and the people in his surrounding area, to provide an answer to the difficulties that arise"* (Vlaamse overheid, 2012, p. 4). This decentralisation of care ultimately targets to increase the participation and ownership of the client instead of making an (immediate) appeal to specialised care. In other words, the client and his or her natural family and social network are defined as the first and most important sources of help. While in the second half of the 20th century parents of children at risk were made 'invisible' in order to legitimise governmental intervention, they are currently made more 'visible' than ever. Again, it seems crucial to 'take history with us' in order to explore and analyse this current trend. We may not forget that many problems of children and

young people are directly associated with their immediate environment. Therefore prudence is called for any effort in stressing the importance of the family network in finding solutions (Vanobbergen, 2014). This process could even lead to targeting those families and parents who don't have the capacity or ability to empower themselves and their children. It is imaginable that these 'vulnerable' families would get the blame as the problems of these children and their families can easily be simplified and defined as the failure of a particular family. And look, we are back at the start of this dissertation.

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Nederlandstalige samenvatting

Tussen vroeger en vandaag. Overheidsinterventies en kinderen in residentiële instellingen: een plek van eeuwig debat? Een casestudy van de weeshuizen van de stad Gent.

Dit doctoraatsonderzoek is vertrokken vanuit een bijzondere interesse voor de zogenaamde *'children at risk'*. Een begrip dat de jongste jaren uitvoerig is bediscussieerd in de internationale literatuur (Bakker, Braster, Rietveld-Van Wingerden & Van Gorp, 2007; Dekker, 2001; 2007; 2009; Grosvenor, 2009; Kalb, 2013; Komen, 1999; Lohmann & Mayer, 2009; Mayer, Lohmann & Grosvenor, 2009; Vanobbergen, 2009). Men heeft het desgevallend over kinderen die enerzijds een risico vormen voor de maatschappij en anderzijds zelf een risico lopen. Het zijn kinderen die tegelijkertijd als 'kind in gevaar' en als 'kind als gevaar' worden gepercipieerd. Gedurende de 19de en 20ste eeuw zijn zeer specifieke en steeds veranderende interventies ontworpen ten aanzien van een waaier aan categorieën van *'at risk'* kinderen. Het is een verhaal van voortdurende expansie over de aanhoudende creatie van nieuwe risicokinderen, met daaruit voortvloeiend het uitvaardigen van nieuwe maatregelen om aan de (nieuwe) risico's zoveel mogelijk paal en perk te stellen. Deze batterij aan (overheids)initiatieven vertrekt vanuit een risico-reducerende gedachte waarbij men zowel de risico's voor het kind als de risico's voor de (toekomstige) samenleving tracht te beperken tot het minimum. Weeshuizen en weeskinderen zijn een exemplarisch voorbeeld van dergelijke overheidsinterventie en zijn onder meer daarom veelvuldig onderwerp van onderzoek (Coldrey, 2000; Colacço, 2009; Groenveld, Dekker & Willemse, 1997; Hacsi, 1997; Jacobi, 2009; Murdoch, 2006; Søland, 2015).

Het leeuwendeel van de auteurs situeert de oorsprong van deze weeskinderen aan het begin van de negentiende eeuw. Net op een ogenblik dat de overheid tal van initiatieven ging ontwikkelen om het op moreel vlak in gevaar verkerende kind te redden voor de samenleving. De focus lag op die kinderen die werden blootgesteld aan ellende, verlatenheid en verwaarlozing wat in de toenmalig vigerende gedachtegang onontkoombaar zou geleid hebben tot delinquentie. Mede daarom dienden net deze kinderen beschermd te worden tegen de negatieve gevolgen van hun verderfelijke milieu alsook die van de samenleving. Men bestempelde deze groep kinderen als wezen, vondelingen, verwaarloosde en verlaten kinderen. Die kinderen waarvan de ouder(s), om welke reden dan ook, niet (langer) de primaire opvoeder(s) waren en de staat bijgevolg de opvoeding (partieel) overnam. Het ouderloze kind werd omgevormd tot het potentieel delinquente kind dat via instituten zoals de weeshuizen 'gered' moest worden. Er werd met andere woorden een duidelijk pedagogisch antwoord gegeven op een sociaal probleem. Dit doctoraatsonderzoek plaatst zich binnen de internationale onderzoekstraditie naar de geschiedenis van *'the*

child at risk' en krijgt vorm binnen de casus van de Gentse weeshuizen in de tweede helft van de 20ste eeuw. De literatuurstudie rond *'the child at risk'* krijgt voornamelijk een plaats in de introductie en hoofdstuk twee van het doctoraat. Verder heeft het *'children at risk'* discours gefungeerd als theoretisch kader waarbij het de bouwstenen voor de uitwerking van het empirisch onderzoek aanleverde.

Dichter bij huis en in relatie tot onze concrete onderzoekscontext werden in de stad Gent de eerste weeshuizen geopend in het begin van de 17de eeuw, maar ondanks hun lange en rijke geschiedenis bestaat er tot op heden bijzonder weinig wetenschappelijk onderzoek naar de verschillende Gentse weeshuizen. Wat we erover weten, leren we vooral uit eerder populaire literatuur (De Bleecker, 1990, 2010; De Smet, 1985; Bate, 2008) en enkele licentiaatthesissen aan de Universiteit van Gent (Cooremans, 1985; De Greve & Van Eetvelt, 1980; De Keyser, 1985; Vael, 1989). De periode na de Tweede Wereldoorlog is daarbij op geen enkel moment onderwerp van onderzoek. In dit doctoraatsonderzoek focussen we ons daarom op de laatste periode in de geschiedenis van de Gentse stedelijke weeshuizen, de periode van 1945 tot 1984. Tijdens deze periode waren we immers niet alleen getuige van een fusie van het stedelijke jongensweeshuis in de Martelaarslaan en het stedelijke meisjesweeshuis in de Rodelijvekensstraat, maar voltrok zich ook een markante populatiewijziging en met het sluiten van het laatste weeshuis in 1984 kwam een eeuwenlange zorgtraditie in de Gentse stad tot zijn eind. Daarnaast biedt deze de periode 1945- 1984 ons ook de mogelijkheid om via mondelinge geschiedenis, verhalen over de Gentse weeshuizen te registreren en construeren.

Dit doctoraatsonderzoek bestaat uit acht hoofdstukken, naast het inleidend en het besluitend hoofdstuk worden in zes hoofstukken de volgende acht onderzoeksvragen beantwoord.

ONDERZOEKSVRAGEN	HOOFDSTUK
Welke kinderen kwamen terecht in een Gents weeshuis?	2
Is het mogelijk om het 'weeskind' te zien als 'child at risk'?	2
Wat was de rol en de functie van de Gentse weeshuizen in de bredere Gentse samenleving?	2
(Hoe) Hadden de pedagogische ambities van de Commissie van Openbare onderstand invloed op de onderliggende pedagogische missie van de Gentse weeshuizen?	3
Een zoektocht naar erkenning – Een aanwezigheid van het verleden?	4
Een zoektocht naar sociale rechtvaardigheid – Een politiek van verontschuldiging?	5
Een zoektocht naar de persoonlijke geschiedenis – Het persoonlijk dossier?	6
Een zoektocht naar methodologische reflectie – onderzoeksethiek?	7

Het eerste luik van dit onderzoek focust zich op het vergaren van inzicht in het dagelijkse leven van de kinderen tijdens hun verblijf in een Gents weeshuis, met als primair doel deze instituten te contextualiseren in tijd en ruimte. Om een antwoord te vinden op de eerste probleemstellingen is een onderzoek in het archief OCMW van Gent uitgevoerd waarbij vooral de resterende documenten van de drie weeshuizen na de Tweede Wereldoorlog onderwerp van interesse waren. De persoonlijke dossiers van de weeskinderen, de jaarlijkse rapporten van het COO/OCMW, de registratieregisters van de jongens en de meisjes maar ook talloze (algemene) beleidsdocumenten zoals: briefwisseling, financiële verslagen, logboeken van de opvoed(st)ers, enz. Daarnaast werd ook het archief van de secretaris van de COO/OCMW bestudeerd en de sociale dossiers van de gezinnen waarvan één of meerdere kinderen werden opgenomen in Prins Filip. Daarnaast vond een *oral history*

onderzoek plaats bij 40 oud-weesmeisjes en jongens en bij 5 voormalig personeelsleden van deze voorzieningen. De jongste respondent was 53 jaar oud en de oudste meer dan 90 jaar oud. Gemiddeld duurde een interview een tweetal uur en werd het afgenomen bij de respondenten thuis. Alle gesprekken zijn integraal opgenomen en vervolgens letterlijk getranscribeerd. De respondenten werden in eerste instantie via lokale media en internetsites opgespoord. Al snel kregen we via de geïnterviewde oud-wezen de contactgegevens van andere toenmalige lotgenoten waardoor het zoeken naar respondenten in zijn algemeenheid heel vlot verlopen is.

In het eerste hoofdstuk *'Between a Contaminated Past and a Compromised Future The Case of the Ghent Orphanages (1945-1984)'* trachten we enerzijds inzicht te krijgen in het dagelijks leven van de Gentse weeshuizen en anderzijds de rol van deze voorzieningen in de stad Gent te begrijpen. Vermits bij meer dan ¾ van de opgenomen kinderen beide of één ouder(s) nog in leven was, stelden we ons vragen bij de *raison d'être* van deze voorzieningen. Het is daarom interessant om de populatie van de stedelijke weeshuizen in de periode tussen 1945 en 1984 in kaart te brengen. Het label 'wees' verwees oorspronkelijk wel naar de juridische status van een groep ouderloze kinderen maar sinds het begin van de 20ste eeuw merken we een shift naar een meer normatieve invulling van dit concept. De populatie van de Gentse weeskinderen verschoof langzaam maar zeker van 'volle wezen' naar zogenaamde 'sociale gevallen'. Het werd duidelijk dat de Gentse weeshuizen, in de tweede helft van de twintigste eeuw functioneerden als een systeem van zorg voor wat we vandaag jongeren 'in gevaar' of 'pre-delinquenten' kinderen zouden noemen. In een tweede stap, verschoven we onze blik naar de rol en de functies van deze instellingen binnen de bredere samenleving van de stad Gent. Hoewel de bevolking van de weeshuizen veranderde, bleven de plaatselijke autoriteiten, de samenleving en de weeskinderen zelf termen zoals 'weeshuis', 'kulders' en 'weeskinderen' gebruiken.

In het tweede hoofdstuk getiteld: '*The reform ambitions of the Ghent orphan houses after the Second World War (1945-1984)'* analyseerden we de beleidsdiscussies, beslissingen en aspiraties van de Commissie van Openbare Onderstand omtrent de zoektocht naar de meest geschikte opvangmethode voor deze groep kinderen. Deze debatten begonnen als gevolg van een brand in het jongensweeshuis anno 1947. De vele discussies resulteerden uiteindelijk in het bouwen van een nieuw tehuis dat in 1962 'Prins Filip' werd gedoopt. De documentatie van de jarenlange debatten stelden ons in staat te reflecteren over het pedagogische project dat in de archiefdocumenten door de leden van de COO als progressief en vernieuwend werd omschreven.

In het tweede luik van dit doctoraatsonderzoek werd expliciet de verbinding tussen verleden, heden en toekomst gelegd. We beschouwden de retrospectieve narratieven van de oud-wezen en ex-personeelsleden namelijk niet als dé getuigenissen die het verleden representeren, maar als de betekenisverlening die tussen ervaringen uit het verleden en de levende herinneringen van het heden geconstrueerd wordt. Zo

evalueerden de respondenten hun verleden op basis van hun huidige situatie of kaderden zij hun herinneringen vanuit hedendaagse denkkaders en actuele gebeurtenissen. Het werd snel duidelijk dat hun tijd in het weeshuis nog zeer sterk aanwezig is in hun dagelijkse reilen en zeilen. De diverse inhouden die geleid hebben tot de opbouw van het tweede luik in dit onderzoek zijn dan ook gegroeid tijdens het registeren en analyseren van de mondelinge getuigenissen. We werden telkens opnieuw geconfronteerd met een diversiteit aan 'zoektochten' die sterk aanwezig zijn in het leven van onze respondenten. Als onderzoeker kregen we met andere woorden meer dan we vroegen of verhoopt hadden. Deze verschillende 'zoektochten' hebben we vertaald naar onderzoeksvragen die in de hoofdstukken van het tweede deel van dit doctoraat worden geëxpliciteerd. In dit onderzoek wilden we dan ook de nadruk leggen op de wederkerigheid van de relatie tussen de onderzoeker en de respondent binnen de context van mondelinge geschiedenis. Het ging niet alleen over het vergaren van kennis via respondenten maar de respondenten gaven het verdere onderzoek als het ware mee vorm. Dit deel van het doctoraatsonderzoek, dat uit vier hoofdstukken bestaat, tracht hieraan gestalte te geven. Zo stelden de oud-wezen tot op de dag van vandaag pertinente vragen bij het bestaan en het beleid van de Gentse weeshuizen en uiten ze daarbij niet zelden hun ongenoegen over 'wat hen is aangedaan'. Een aanzienlijk deel van hen eist of wenst daarvoor een vorm van erkenning te krijgen. Waar de samenleving ooit een antwoord heeft gegeven op de 'problematische opvoedingssituatie' van deze kinderen, stelt deze groep zich vandaag vragen bij het verleden en zeggen daarmee tegelijkertijd iets over het heden.

Na de vastelling dat deze erkenningsvraag pertinent aanwezig is in het leven van deze oude-wezen, gingen we na wat de zoektocht naar erkenning nu precies inhoudt. Over welk 'soort' erkenning gaat het? Waar vragen de oud-wezen precies erkenning voor? Twee elementen vielen daarbij onmiddellijk op. In de eerste plaats streefde men naar het bekendmaken en in beeld brengen van hun geschiedenis, hun 'gedeelde' jeugd. In de tweede plaats leefde bij de respondenten een verlangen om hun geschiedenis verder levendig te houden. De kinderen van toen houden op hun beurt de herinnering aan de Gentse weeshuizen in stand door bijvoorbeeld tentoonstellingen op te zetten, door Facebook groepen op te richten, door het organiseren van een oud-wezenbond en zo verder. De verhalen over deze ontmoetingen legden de onderlinge onenigheid en strijd tussen de oud-wezen aangaande hun 'gedeeld' verleden bloot. Dit bracht ons ertoe om de geschiedenis van de Gentse weeshuizen als een 'plek van eeuwig debat' *('a never ending contested space')* te conceptualiseren en het begrip 'erkenning' open te breken om zo tegemoet te komen aan de diversiteit van betekenisverlening. Dit deel van het onderzoek resulteerde in een vierde hoofdstuk: *'Remembering the Ghent Orphan Houses: a never ending contested space.'*

Vanuit een ruimer perspectief stelden we vast dat de huidige trend om met deze 'erkenningsvraag' om te gaan in verschillende Europese landen vorm krijgt binnen de

zogenaamde *'politics of apology'* logica. In het vijfde hoofdstuk zijn we hier dieper op ingegaan en stelden we de onderliggende 'waarheidslogica' binnen deze huidige westerse trend in vraag. In 1999 werd reeds aangekondigd dat een zogenaamde 'age of apology' (Gibney, 2008) voor de deur stond en sinds de eeuwwisseling is het aantal officiële overheids-verontschuldigingen inderdaad alleen maar toegenomen. Het hoofdstuk 'Challenging the normative truth logic in the politics of apology: a quest for social justice' kadert deze officiële, publieke verontschuldigingen van overheidswege als een poging om 'in het reine komen met het verleden'. Dit werd begrepen als een proces, waarbij de eisende partij erkenning vraagt voor de ervaringen en herinneringen van verlies en pijn die onderdeel zijn geworden van een collectieve identiteit en een persoonlijk verhaal.

Actueel focussen vele onderzoeken zich in Vlaanderen, Europa en wereldwijd op de geschiedenis van opvoeding, onderwijs en zorg voor kinderen en jongeren in relatie tot (seksueel) misbruik. Het beginpunt van deze onderzoeken ligt vaak in de registratie van signalen of klachten over geweld en (seksueel) misbruik door vroegere bewoners van publieke voorzieningen of overheidsinstellingen. Deze klachten gaven aanleiding tot de samenstelling van een team van experts uit verschillende lagen van de samenleving. Het onderzoeks- of experten team wordt ingezet als een soort 'waarheidscommissie', waarbij 'erkenning' als belangrijk concept wordt geïntroduceerd. De vraagt blijft echter wat de verontschuldigende partij exact erkent of zou moeten erkennen wanneer een officieel excuus wordt uitgesproken. Onvermijdelijk hanteren onderzoekers daarbij een sterk normatief perspectief, vermits ook zij vanuit een bepaalde context en tijdsgeest de verschillende verhalen horen en interpreteren. Met andere woorden, in het proces van het bepalen van waarvoor men zich precies moet verontschuldigen en om na te gaan wat erkent dient te worden, worden vaak onduidelijkheden en tegenstrijdigheden uit de verhalen gefilterd. Dit proces resulteert in een algemeen aanvaard, gemeenschappelijk historische relaas. Enkel op die manier kan men tot een consensus van 'wat er werkelijk gebeurd is', komen. We gaan, in hoofdstuk vijf na of historische onderzoekers deze logica zouden kunnen uitdagen door de relatie tussen 'het verleden' en 'het heden' te herdenken waardoor deze politiek van verontschuldiging meer kan doen dan 'sorry' zeggen, maar ook intervenieert in bestaande opvattingen van probleemconstructies omtrent overheidsinterventies.

In hoofdstuk zes onderzochten we de zoektocht van de oud-wezen naar hun persoonlijke en familiale geschiedenis binnen de context van het persoonlijk dossier. Het hoofdstuk handelt over 'het persoonlijk dossier' binnen de context van residentiële jeugdzorg. In de periode 1945-1984 werd voor elk opgenomen kind een persoonlijk dossier opgemaakt en bijgehouden. Decennia lang zijn deze dossiers bewaard gebleven. Sinds midden de jaren '90 is het mogelijk geworden voor de oud-wezen om hun persoonlijk dossier in te kijken. Velen van hen gaven tijdens de

interviews aan dit heel belangrijk te vinden in hun zoektocht naar hun geschiedenis. De verwachtingen waren hoog gespannen om in hun dossier alle verloren gegane puzzelstukken te vinden, waardoor ze hun verleden en hun heden beter zouden kunnen begrijpen en verbinden met elkaar. De jarenlange discussie over het al dan niet bewaren van persoonlijke dossiers binnen residentiële voorzieningen staat vandaag opnieuw centraal door het (internationale) pleidooi om deze (oude) dossiers publiek te maken, onder meer onder invloed van voormalig geïnstitutionaliseerde kinderen. In ons artikel wilden we het persoonlijk dossier als bron voor historisch onderzoek en als bron voor persoonlijke levensgeschiedenis met elkaar confronteren, waarbij we op verschillende spanningsvelden botsten. Al snel werd duidelijk dat het raadplegen van hun dossier de oud-wezen nieuwe informatie verschafte, maar tegelijkertijd veel vragen opriep die op hun beurt meer dan eens onopgelost bleven. We concludeerden dan ook dat het persoonlijk dossier, als archiefmateriaal niet enkel als bron of sleutel tot het verleden mag gezien worden. Deze persoonlijke dossiers zijn immers evenzeer onderdeel van het heden en de toekomst, waardoor we ervoor pleiten om de huidige discussies hierover niet enkel in termen van 'toegankelijkheid' ('accessibility') te voeren.

In hoofdstuk zeven, 'Discovering different dimensions of research ethics in oral history research: the complexities of going public in the case of the Ghent orphanages', staan we stil bij de ethische reflecties die zich manifesteerden bij het uitoefenen van *oral history.* Tijdens ons onderzoeksproces botsten we op heel wat 'moeilijkheden' of 'uitdagingen' van ethische aard door het gebruik van deze methode. We bedden onze onderzoekservaringen in, in de bestaande literatuur omtrent kwalitatief onderzoek. Hoofdstuk zeven kan daarom gezien worden als een 'alternatief' of eerder aanvullend methodologisch hoofdstuk. We beargumenteren dat in de huidige literatuur voornamelijk aandacht wordt besteedt aan 'procedurele ethiek' maar veel minder aan 'situationele ethiek'. De verrassende maar daarom niet minder relevante vragen van onze respondenten stelden ons in staat om de politieke aard van onderzoeksethiek te ontdekken, en was voor ons een aanleiding om 'publiek' te gaan met ons onderzoek. We deden dit bijvoorbeeld door een tentoonstelling in samenwerking met het archief OCMW op te stellen voor Gentse scholen en de inwoners van Gent. Maar evenzeer door een boek voor een breed toegankelijk publiek te schrijven over de geschiedenis van de Gentse weeshuizen, getiteld: 'Mag ik dit vertellen? Stemmen uit de Gentse weeshuizen 1945-1984.' uitgegeven bij ACCO in 2012.

Het achtste, en laatste hoofdstuk somt de belangrijkste onderzoeksresultaten op en rijgt de verschillende inzichten verworven en verweven doorheen de voorgaande hoofdstukken aan elkaar. Vervolgens namen we de drie belangrijkste thema's uit dit onderzoek een laatste maal onder de loep. We reflecteerden over 'the history of childhood' als academisch onderzoeksdomein. We analyseerden 'the act of apology' en stelden ons de vraag of deze praktijk dient te leiden tot meer verontschuldigingen,

van meer eisende groepen, voor meer soorten onechtvaardigheid. Als laatste stonden we stil bij het huidige *children at risk* discours en de rol van de overheid in dit debat. Hierbij stelden we vast dat na een periode van groeiende overheidsinterventie en inmenging, we vandaag een eerder terugtrekkende houding van de overheid bespeuren. Het recente geloof en pleidooi voor de vermaatschappelijking van de zorg illustreert deze tendens.

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% Data Storage Fact Sheet

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If a response is not received when using the above contact details, please send an email to data.pp@ugent.be or contact Data Management, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Henri Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Ghent, Belgium.

2. Information about the datasets to which this sheet applies
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* Reference of the publication in which the datasets are reported:

De Wilde, L. (2012) Between the past and the present. Government interventions and children in residential care: A never ending contested space? The case of the orphanages of the city of Ghent. (Doctoral dissertation)

De Wilde, L. & Vanobbergen, B. (Accepted) Between a Contaminated Past and a Compromised Future. The Case of

the Ghent Orphanages.(1945-1984)in *Paedagogica historica.* International Journal of the History of Education.

De Wilde, L. & Vanobbergen, B. (Accepted) The reform ambitions of the Ghent orphan houses after the Second World War (1945–1984). In book 'For your own good' Research on Youth justice practices. VUB.

De Wilde, L. & Vanobbergen, B. (2015) Remembering the Ghent orphanages: A never-ending contested space. In *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth, 8*(1), 94-105.

De Wilde, L., Roets, G., & Vanobbergen, B.,(submitted)Challenging the normative truth logic in the politics of apology: a quest for social justice. Critical Social Policy.

De Wilde, L. & Vanobbergen, B. (Submitted), Puzzling history. The personal file in residential care: a source for life history and historical research. History of Education Journal of the History of Education Society.

De Wilde, L., Roets, G., & Vanobbergen, B. (Submitted), Discovering different dimensions of research ethics in oral history research: the complexities of going public in the case of the Ghent orphanages. Qualitative Research.

* Which datasets in that publication does this sheet apply to?:

All.

3. Information about the files that have been stored
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3a. Raw data

-
Interview data:

* Have the raw data been stored by the main researcher?[x]YES/[ ] NO

If NO, please justify:

* On which platform are the raw data stored?
  - [x] researcher PC
  - [ ] research group file server
  - [x] other (specify): The archive of the Public Centre of Social Welfare. Archief OCMW Gent. Neermeerskaai 1b.9000 Gent.

* Who has direct access to the raw data (i.e., without intervention of another person)?
  - [x] main researcher
  - [x] responsible ZAP
  - [ ] all members of the research group
  - [ ] all members of UGent
  - [ ] other (specify): ...

Archive data:

* Have the raw data been stored by the main researcher?[ ]YES/[x] NO
If NO, please justify:

* On which platform are the raw data stored?
  - [ ] researcher PC
  - [ ] research group file server
  - [x] other (specify): The archive of the Public Centre of Social Welfare. Archief OCMW Gent. Neermeerskaai 1b. 9000 Gent.

* Who has direct access to the raw data (i.e., without intervention of another person)?
  - [ ] main researcher
  - [ ] responsible ZAP
  - [ ] all members of the research group
  - [ ] all members of UGent
  - [x] other (specify): The archive of the Public Centre of Social Welfare.

3b. Other files

Interview data:

* Which other files have been stored?
  - [x] file(s) describing the transition from raw data to reported results. Specify: Transcriptions interviews.

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  - [ ] file(s) containing processed data. Specify: ...
  - [ ] file(s) containing analyses. Specify: ...
  - [x] files(s) containing information about informed
consent
  - [ ] a file specifying legal and ethical provisions
  - [ ] file(s) that describe the content of the stored
files and how this content should be interpreted. Specify:
...
  - [ ] other files. Specify: ...


* On which platform are these other files stored?
  - [x] individual PC
  - [x] research group file server
  - [ ] other: ...

* Who has direct access to these other files (i.e.,
without intervention of another person)?
  - [x] main researcher
  - [x] responsible ZAP
  - [ ] all members of the research group
  - [ ] all members of UGent
  - [x] other (specify): Server administrator of the
departement.

Archive data:

* Which other files have been stored?
  - [x] file(s) describing the transition from raw data to
reported results. Specify: Notes of the archival material.
  - [ ] file(s) containing processed data. Specify: ...
  - [ ] file(s) containing analyses. Specify: ...
  - [ ] files(s) containing information about informed
consent
  - [ ] a file specifying legal and ethical provisions
  - [ ] file(s) that describe the content of the stored
files and how this content should be interpreted. Specify:
...
  - [ ] other files. Specify: ...


* On which platform are these other files stored?
  - [x] individual PC
  - [x] research group file server
  - [ ] other: ...

* Who has direct access to these other files (i.e.,
without intervention of another person)?
  - [x] main researcher
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  - [x] responsible ZAP
  - [ ] all members of the research group
  - [ ] all members of UGent
  - [x] other (specify): Server administrator of the
departement.


4. Reproduction
================================================================
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* Have the results been reproduced independently?: [ ] YES
/ [x] NO

* If yes, by whom (add if multiple):
   - name:
   - address:
   - affiliation:
   - e-mail:


v0.2
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