**Criminology in Belgium, from embryonic conception to contemporary currents in a nutshell. Some food for thought.**

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**Introduction**

It has become a tradition that conference organizers are asked to briefly summarize the state of the art of criminology in their country. Although Belgium is a rather small and relatively young nation, it has a long and rich historical tradition in criminological research. In fact, research topics which today would fall under the wide umbrella of criminological research have been imported from Belgium’s neighbouring countries as soon as the Belgian nation-state emerged. As it is not the first time that Belgium is the stage for the ESC conference, we have the advantage that we do not need to start from scratch. A fine introduction to Belgian criminology has already been published in this newsletter. Dantinne and Duchêne (2010) wrote an excellent introduction prior to the 2010 ESC conference in Liège. When the 2010 ESC conference took place in Liège, we would not have believed that 9 years later, our research group would be responsible for preparing the 19th conference of the ESC. When we realized we were supposed to write an article on criminology in Belgium, the first reaction,- when informally talking to colleagues-, was: ‘hasn’t everybody read something on the historical developments of the schools of criminology in Belgium?’. Excellent articles and book chapters document Belgian criminological research in different domains (e.g. Bruinsma and Walgrave, 2009; Snacken, 2007; Daems, Maes and Robert, 2013; Daems and Parmentier, 2017; see also the capita selected at the end of this article).

However, there is always room for an additional point of view, reflecting our own perceptions on the development of criminology in Belgium. Besides that, nine years have passed since the ESC took place in Belgium for the first time. This implies that a new generation of young and promising scholars who will attend the conference probably does not know the history of criminology in the hosting country. We try to identify past and contemporary currents and shed a light on both the emergence, development of criminological research traditions on the one hand and criminology as an educational programme on the other . As we describe Belgian criminology in a nutshell, we are forced to take some shortcuts. We have decided to divide the emergence and development of Belgian criminology into distinguishable time intervals (early positivism, 1945-1960s, 1980s-2000, and recent developments). We also touch upon research funding and contemporary challenges. As the conference overall theme is ‘Convergent roads, bridges and new pathways in criminology’, we inevitably must ask the question to what extent criminology converges or diverges in Belgium. Asking the question is much easier than answering it, but traveling through the many ‘archives’ of Belgian criminology has been a pleasant (and unfinished) journey to us.

**The early days of positivism and the establishment of different schools of criminology**

***On Adolphe Quételet, area characteristics and propensities***

Textbooks typically give an outline of the history of criminology by discussing extensively the Classical School of thought, highlighting the works of Beccaria and Bentham and the utilitarian tradition, followed by the first wave of ‘Positivism’ (e.g. Spierenburg, 2016). The emergence of criminology in Belgium begins with framing the emergence of the Belgian monarchy in 1830. At that time, criminology did not exist as an institutionalized discipline. Before 1830, Belgium did not exist as a country and was part of the Netherlands from 1814-1830 (together called ‘the Low Lands’) and before that, Belgium was part of France (under the reign of Napoléon Bonaparte, who temporarily reigned over a large part of the European continent before being defeated in the battle of Waterloo).[[1]](#endnote-1)

Crime, crime causation, prevention, rehabilitation, law-making, and the institutional embeddedness, were topics that drew the attention of academics and policymakers at the dawn of the Belgian state. The Belgian Penal Code is a perfect example of a code which was directly affected by the ‘rationality’ principles and the utilitarian principles of Beccaria, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill on the one hand and early biological, psychological and sociological positivist schools on the other hand. From the second half of the 19th century, continental Europe became strongly under the influence of biological, psychological and sociological positivism. Many scholars identify Lombroso as the father of positivism, but it has to be underscored that the Belgian scholar Adolphe Quételet (Born in Ghent February 22, 1796 – died in Brussels, February 17, 1874) already conducted criminologically relevant research when Lombroso was still a toddler (Bruinsma 2010). One may wonder why we emphasize a ‘moral statistician’ like Quételet in an article on (historical) developments in Belgian criminology. While textbooks mention Quételet as a (moralizing) positivist, this caricature is simply wrong. 19th-century European scholars, like Quételet contributed much more to early criminological theorizing than one would expect, most notably on the Chicago School. The idea of early European scholars like Quételet were well known among the established scholars of the early Chicago School, but these ideas were remarkably less cited (Weisburd, 2017).

Quételet was more than an astronomer. He also was the first professor of mathematics at Ghent University. When applying probability theory to social data, he discovered many ‘regularities’ which puzzled criminologists *‘avant la lettre’* back then but still puzzle criminologists at the beginning of the 21st century. The discovery of ‘social laws’ inevitably led to flawed deterministic interpretations of the relationship between area characteristics and criminal statistics. Such was the Zeitgeist. On the one hand, positivism liberated science from religion and provided natural explanations for natural phenomena, instead of invoking god(s), demons. On the other hand, immature sciences and naïve ideas about the necessity of blindly copying methods developed in the natural sciences were the precursors of its ultimate downfall in the 20th century. However, Quételet wrote a lot more on crime. In his book ‘A treatise on man and the development of his faculties’, he wrote about criminal propensities (‘les propensions et les facultés de l’homme’) and displayed the age-crime curve based on Belgian criminal records, long before contemporary (developmental) psychology/criminology discussed these topics. Quételet was remarkably prudent in his writings and stressed that his findings should not be interpreted with the fatalism which is generally ascribed to early positivism. Being an expert on probability theory must have been a good enough antidote to fatalistic interpretations. Quételet also invited the readers of his work to reflect on social crime prevention and rehabilitation. A socially engaged scholarship has been part of Belgian criminology since it’s early days. As an emerging nation, the Belgian policymakers of that time did not need to perform a complex search for a good statistician to fit the job to build the first (criminal) statistics. As often is the case in the development of traditions, expertise is not enough, some luck helps as well. Quételet was the ‘right person at the right time’. He was already an established scholar of his time due to his previous geographical inquiries on France (Bruinsma 2010).

***The Belgian Anthropological Tradition: a cocktail of Italian and French schools of thought***

In the second half of the 19th century, biological positivism gained momentum with Lombroso’s now defunct theory of atavism, a complete misunderstanding of Darwin’s theory of evolution. The Italian anthropological school (Cesare Lombroso [1835-1909], Enrico Ferri [1856-1929], etc.) and the French environmental anthropological school of thought (Alexandre Lacassagne [1843-1924 and Gabriel Tarde [1843-1904]) had a profound influence on early Belgian criminal anthropology, of which Louis Vervaeck (1872-1943) was a famous example (De Bont, 2001). Louis Vervaeck was a prison director and founder of the penitentiary anthropological services. He obtained his degree of medicine at the Université Libre de Bruxelles. He was nicknamed the ‘Belgian Lombroso’, although his ideas strongly diverged from Lombroso in some ways, especially regarding the role of social (environmental and ecological) influences on criminality, criminal behavior, and recidivism. Louis Vervaeck was not an academic, but an engaged social reformer (in its 19th-century meaning). Early Belgian criminal anthropology was already from the beginning a mixture of schools of thought and thus an example of early ‘integrative risk factor thinking’ avant-la-lettre. Indeed, the unique geographical position of Belgium can be related to its combined influence of Anglo-Saxon / German and French research traditions).[[2]](#endnote-2) The early Positivist schools left their mark on criminal policy and the Penal Code which was transformed by disciples of the *Early* S*ocial Defence Movement* (Professor Adolphe Prins advised both the Catholic Minister of Justice Jules Lejeune (1828-1911) [[3]](#endnote-3) and the influential Emile Vandervelde[[4]](#endnote-4) (1866-1938, minister of Justice between 1918-1921)(see Cartuyvels, Champetiers and Wyvekens, 2010), In this historical timeframe a series of rudimentary insights emerged on the differential treatment of minors who committed an ‘offence’. During the following decades, a number of initiatives were undertaken in the criminal justice system, aiming to put Social Defence ideas into practice. Criminology in those days was very closely tied to criminal justice policy and was nothing but an auxiliary science to criminal law. Criminal policy was almost exclusively made by Ministers who were either professor of law, lawyer, and who were de facto advised by professors of law. The law of the conditional release of prisoners, aka the ‘Lejeune’-law of 1888, introduced by the former Minister of Justice Lejeune was one of the most famous products of this movement. Another example is the emergence of a separate youth protection legal system in 1912 (Put and Walgrave, 2006; Christiaens and Nuytiens, 2009) and the separate ‘treatment’ of mentally ill offenders (literally: the much contestated law of 1930 designed to protect society against abnormal and habitual offenders see also Cosyns and Goethals, 2013 and Vandevelde et al, 2011).

Dantinne and Duchênne (2010) describe how in 1890, A. Prins (Professor of Natural Law, 1845-1919) and F. Héger-Gilbert (Professor of Medicine, 1849-1925) established a university group for criminology studies at the Université Libre de Bruxelles. The strong interests of legal scholars in transforming the law to better fit human nature than a ‘narrow rationalist’ dogma partly explains why Belgian criminology was institutionalized in Law schools. The same development could be observed in Germany (Landecker, 1941) and the Netherlands (Tonry and Bijleveld, 2007) Back then, criminology was of importance to lawyers and psychiatrists (see also Bruinsma and Walgrave, 2009). Legal scholars and judges had to apply the Penal Code and ‘understand the etiology of those who broke the law’, while psychiatrists were supposed to ‘treat’ those who broke the law and answer the difficult question of legal responsibility at the time of the commitment of the crime they were convicted for. This explains why the first criminology students were either lawyers or psychiatrists, taking an additional course in ‘criminal science’ (or ‘sciences criminelles’, a generic term). The German professor of criminal law Franz von Liszt (1851-1919) founded the International Criminalistic Association in 1889 together with the Belgian Adolphe Prins and the Dutch Gerhard van Hamel. This association was devoted to the study of crime as a social phenomenon and to the promotion of a theory of punishment as a means of preventing crime (Landecker, 1941).

In 1937, the International Society of Criminology was founded, its first conference took place in 1938 in Paris.[[5]](#endnote-5) At that time, polarized discussions took place between the different anthropological schools. Daems, Maes and Robert (2013) describe how these early evolutions gave rise to the establishment of schools of criminology in the first decades after World War I. Within the faculties of Law, schools of criminology were established in Leuven (1929), Brussels (1935), Ghent (1938), and Liege (1938).

The school of criminology at Ghent University was established by former Dean of the Faculty of Law Nico Gunzburg (Cools et al., 2013). Professor Etienne De Greeff (1898-1961, Leuven University) was the leading Belgian academic of the anthropological tradition in Belgium. Under his supervision, several doctoral dissertations were written (Casselman, 2011). Among his famous students were Jean Pinatel (1913-1999) and Christian Debuyst (1925- 1990, Université Catholique de Louvain), who introduced a clinical and phenomenological tradition in Belgium.

**From 1945 to the 1960s**

After World War II, the Belgian anthropological schools lost their influence and vanished. This was mainly due to the connections between early biological positivism and social Darwinism (or better said Spencerism), nazi ideology and atrocities and the Eugenic movement (which originally was embraced by politicians at both the left and the right-wing side of the spectrum) . Early biological positivism was a complete failure as the ‘atavistic’ theory of Lombroso and other have been discarded (see Rafter, 2008) for a discussion and the fear of scholars of being associated with regimes who totally abused Darwin’s theory of evolution and kept criminologists away from biology[[6]](#endnote-6). this was the case in Belgium just like in other countries in which criminology was taught. However, the decline of the anthropological school was not the end of positivism in the field of penal law and criminology. A slightly revised version of the social defence movement (‘la défence sociale nouvelle’ or the new social defence, a term coined by Marc Ancel, 1954) emerged This new social defense movement was inspired by a humanistic approach, in which individual liberty was socially embedded and in which ‘social defense’ was argued to be interprtered in terms of providing services to those who wre at risk of falling out. This movement had worthy ideals: improving the legal status of detainees, rehabilitation. In practice, only minor changes were made in juvenile law (the law of the protection of juveniles (1912) was changed by the law of the protection of juveniles of 1965. Criminologist Gerda De Bock (1922-2011), criminologist, lawyer, a founder of social work in Flanders, was the first female full professor at Ghent University. She taught courses on juvenile justice and played a pioneering role in a welfare approach to (institutionalized) juveniles and juvenile justice. This welfare approach would become more visible in the 1960s and the installment of the social welfare educational program at Ghent University. The new social defense movement was further embraced in different Belgian schools e.g. at Ghent University by professor of psychiatry Paul Ghysbrecht (1927-1998), and professor of penal law Willy Calewaert (1916-1993) who combined his chair with that of being a lawyer and activist, member of the resistance during World War II and of Minister of Education (1973-1974 and 1980-1981). Etienne De Greeff exemplifies the social psychological positivism at Leuven University and Christian Debuyst at the Catholic University of Louvain. (Social psychological positivism was dominant in this time frame. In Belgium, criminology was seen as an *auxiliary science* of law at least until the 1960s (Daems and Parmentier, 2017). The social defense philosophy was meant as an overarching philosophy binding penlists, criminologists, lawyers, humanists, philosophers of law, …

**From the 1960s to the 1990s in a nutshell**

Several developments, such as the discovery of hidden crime and the development of a sociology of deviance and social reaction (especially labeling theories and conflict theories, but also Marxist theories) contributed to the awakening of a more ‘independent’ criminology, i.e. as a discipline sui generis, more than ‘just an auxiliary science’ of law. Belgian professors at different institutions started to incorporate these ideas and apply them to the study of different aspects of the criminal justice system. Belgian criminology became much more diverse because of this sociological impetus. Some examples can illustrate this. The sociology of punishment and penology became strong and major research areas at the VUB (Free University Brussels) and ULB (Université Libre De Bruxelles), victimology and restorative justice became key areas of research at the University of Leuven. Also, critical criminologies found its way to several universities, e.g. at Ghent University (Nathan Weinstock, Patrick Hebberecht (1951-2015)- see Decorte et al. 2016) and Leuven University (Lode Van Outrive, 1932-2009), Louvain-la-Neuve (Guy Houchon, 1932-2019; Fabienne Brion). The psychiatric-psychological approaches became less popular among academics, but they remained important among practitioners. Institutionally, the 1960s were very important to Belgian criminology. It is a period of gradual independence as criminology became an educational programme in its own right in this decade (see later). It was no longer necessary to have obtained a degree in law before studying criminology. The establishment of criminology as a separate educational programme marked the beginning of an era in which criminological research would explode and criminology student numbers would rise, somewhat like the butterfly’s wings, causing a hurricane at the other end of the world.

The 1980s were characterized by a series of events that profoundly shocked Belgium (a.o. the still-unsolved case of Killers of Brabant[[7]](#endnote-7), terrorist activities of the CCC, a group of communist extremists targeting federal buildings in the 1980s, …), the criminological inquiries ordered by federal institutions were mostly small scale research projects mainly on petty crime, burglary, etc.. , thereby partially following the situational approach which became very strong in the U.K. and U.S.

Empirical research in Belgian criminology has always existed in this time frame, but it was scarce when looked upon from a frame of contemporary -international publication standards, which stresses output and metrics *(and that is definitely not a value judgement)* for several reasons. In this contribution, we can only shortly touch upon some factors we assume were relevant to understanding this phenomenon. *Firstly*, academia was structurally and culturally different. There was no publication pressure as we experience today and stimulating Ph.D. projects was not stressed in the same way it is stressed now. *Secondly*, methodologically, Belgian criminology programmes were not as advanced and rich as they are today, both in terms of qualitative and quantitative research methods. There was much more emphasis on methodology in criminology programmes which were developed in faculties of social sciences. *Thirdly*, especially data on crime and the criminal justice system (including morphology of the police forces, public prosecution, judges etc…) were of extremely bad quality. Some examples. The first attempts to systematically understand the problems of police data and create useful police statistics only go back to the 1980s, and even today the situation is suboptimal as data access and quality still pose reasearchers for difficult issues[[8]](#endnote-8) *Fourth*, the personal preferences of scholars and their academic socialization in different research traditions also play a subtle role in the cultural evolution of research traditions.

**Belgian criminology from the 1990s into the new millennium**

In 1991, the School for Criminology in Ghent was reintegrated in the Law Faculty. [[9]](#endnote-9) While Belgian criminologists have always been visible in international criminology (each in their own tradition through participation at the ASC and ISC), they started to participate *in larger numbers* in international projects since the 1990s. An early example of this is the Belgian participation in the International Self-Reported Delinquency Study since its beginnings. Another phenomenon is the growth of empirical research to inform Belgian criminal policy and crime prevention strategies by Belgian local or regional authorities.

Belgium did not have a fully developed crime prevention policy in the 1980s, but this changed in the 1990s, leading to a series of new studies on petty crime, drug use, prostitution, organized crime, the organizationalstructure of prevention policies and actors, …. Electoral successes of right-wing populist parties (especially that of the Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest), a Flemish nationalist party, Vlaams Blok in 1991) played, without doubt, a significant role in the attention local and federal governments paid to the study of a wider array of criminal phenomena, neighbourhood problems (disorder) and public fear. Quantitative criminology developed rather late in comparison to the Anglo-Saxon tradition, and this is both to be understood in terms of personal preferences, the historical context but also practical resaons, i.e. the huge lack of data in Belgium. By the 1990s, it became possible to use integrated police statistics, combining police statistics from different police forces, giving a total overview,and federal, regional and local survey data in Belgium.[[10]](#endnote-10) The infamous Dutroux case led to the reorganization of the Belgian police and the large-scale introduction of Anglosaxon policing strategies (Ponsaers and De Kimpe, 2001). The widespread fear of crime led to the emergence of a ‘fear of crime’ research tradition, especially among policymakers and later academics (Pleysier, 2009) At the dawn of the new millennium, one could also observe a small revival of etiological research. Theories which drew the attention of empirical inquiries in Belgium include the theory of societal vulnerability (developed in the 1980s at Leuven University by a.o. Jaak Van Kerckvoorde, Lode Walgrave, Nicole Vettenburg), and since the end of the 1990s (not exhaustively): Social Disorganization Theory, Strain Theory, Situational Action Theory, and Procedural Justice Theory.

By the beginning of the 21st century, the Belgian criminological landscape (research and education) exploded in many ways. Belgian criminal policy is no longer focusing on social prevention and soft situational prevention, but a security perspective becomes increasingly present in Belgium, affecting the kind of studies which were undertaken, the resources provided by governments, and thus the research programmes. While Belgian criminologists before the 1990s predominantly wrote in their native languages (Dutch and French) and had a strong Belgian focus, criminologists are now increasingly writing PhDs, articles, book, book chapters and research reports in English.[[11]](#endnote-11) However, many (if not all) Belgian criminologists publish both in their native language and English. This situation is not exclusively related to Belgian criminology. Prractitioners and policymakers are scarcely interested in reading (lengthy) academic research papers. Therefore in countries where the language spoken is not English, researchers have to publish in their native language about the policy implications of their research in order to communicate this to decisionmakers and have an effect on policy. t audiences. Without a doubt, the establishment of the ESC has been and more than ever continues to be an important facilitating factor enabling the international visibility of European (and thus also Belgian) scholars, by unlocking Belgian studies to a European audience. Cooperations between scholars of different Belgian universities or traditions take place in many forms, sometimes in the form of very project-specific needs and expertises, sometimes under the form of joint PhD’s, sometimes based on common interests and expertise. [[12]](#endnote-12) Since 2008, an increasing number of Ph.D. studies has been written in English and at the same time, a debate emerges on the added value of writing a Ph.D. in either the format of a book or as a series of articles. The debate continues today, with valuable arguments at both sides of the debate. In reality, although not at all universities, Ph.D. studies are often written in the article format.

Another emerging trend in (especially government-based) research is evaluation research. To some extent, this trend is a consequence of policy pressure on (local) initiatives to prevent crime and to prevent recidivism (e.g. the evaluation of good practices and local tools to monitor policy). Belgian criminologists have always been criticial towards this widening trend (e.g. Pleysier, 2008). While a number of political scientists have been studying political violence for ages, the topic of political violence (under the misleading but amongst policymakers and politicians popular term ‘radicalization’) is only ‘recently’ (since 2010) visible in the history of Belgian criminological research and criminal policy. After the Paris attacks (Charlie Hebdo, 7/01/2015; Bataclan, 13/11/2015) and the attacks at Zaventem National Airport and subway station Maelbeek (Brussels, 22/03/2016), this topic has found considerable political attention and hence research funding.

With regard to funding, the Belgian research landscape has several funding opportunities, of which the FWO (Research Foundation Flanders) and the FNRS (Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique for Wallonia-Brussels) are the best-known. Apart from this type of funding, research is also funded by federal organisations[[13]](#endnote-13) and regional departments. Fundamental research is also funded by university funds. As the central body of forensic investigation in Belgium, the National Institute for Criminalistics and Criminology (NICC) conducts forensic expert investigations at the request of the competent judicial authorities , offers significant added value to the judiciary, and delivers high-quality scientific research. The primary activity of the NICC is to conduct forensic assessments, in support of the judicial investigation and therefore also of the citizen seeking justice. The NICC hosts a lot of forensic expertise. In addition, criminological research is carried out in consultation with and for the judicial authorities and criminal justice policy authorities. Both research into new areas of expertise and scientific criminalistics techniques, as well as criminological research into better knowledge and approach to crimes and criminal policy. Other key tasks of the NICC are the preparation and management of register data, the provision of advice to the judicial authorities, the organization of training of judicial actors; the cooperation in the scientific coordination of the Laboratories for Technical and Scientific Police. The NICC conduct criminological research as a research partner with different Belgian criminology departments and delivers expertise as members of guidance committees in criminological research projects in field which cover their expertise.

Funding by the Ministries of the Interior or Justice has become more scarce compared to a decade ago, and a central institution that coordinates and *converges* criminological research is lacking today. The DSB (Service for Criminal Policy), has played this role for some years and instigated and guided criminological research (see <http://www.dsb-spc.be>) but has now been integrated in the FOD Justice (Ministry of Justice).

**Research practices, research ethics and DMP**

Not only topic-wise changes in research domains can be noticed. Another area that has undergone considerable evolution is the area of research methods and research ethics. After all, criminology has not been spared of examples of research misconduct, which of course raises awareness. As on an international level, ethical research practices have gained considerable attention in Belgium, which can be illustrated by the development of ethical committees on the level of Belgian universities (to report potential breaches of academic integrity) and on the level of the faculties (for support and advice of researchers with regard to the ethical issues that can be part of their research). In classes, students are also increasingly made aware of the problems of unethical research. Research ethics also entails the proper use of research data, and both students and researchers need to think about how to store their data safely and with whom data can be shared. The research data management plan (DMP) is crucial in this respect and has gained a basic place in every kind of research (either by students or by researchers).

**Developments in the educational landscape**

In this paragraph, we describe developments in the criminology programmes in Belgium. The 1960s and 1970s were t an era of political unrest characterized by widespread protests (e.g. protest against the Vietnam War, the oil crisis) . This era was also a time of unrest among the youth across Europe and the world, characterised by student protests and countercultures. E.g., in France, this would culminate in student unrest in May 1968. In Belgium, political tensions related to language issues intensified and led to a total split-up of the univer­sities of Brussels and Leuven. When Belgium emerged as a nation, French was used as the [*lingua franca*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lingua_franca) of the [upper classes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upper_class), while the country was officially bilingual. This issue has historically been raised by the [Flemish Movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flemish_Movement) who demanded an enhanced status for the Dutch language. These demands became increasingly vocal after 1967. Legally, the secession of Leuven university occurred in 1970. This critical event shook [Belgian politics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belgian_politics) and led to the fall of the government of [Paul Vanden Boeynants](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Vanden_Boeynants). The secession of Leuven university marked an escalation of linguistic tensions in Belgium after [World War II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II) and had lasting consequences for other bilingual educational and political institutions. In 1970, the first of [several state reforms](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_reform_in_Belgium) occurred, marking the birth of Belgium's complex transition to a [federal state](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federalism). see also Daems, Maes and Robert, 2013). The first fully independent programme of criminology was established in 1965 at Leuven University by the psychiatrist René Dellaert, with the help of Steven De Batselier (1932-2007) (see Daems and Parmentier, 2017). At Ghent University, a full-fledged programme (consisting of both a 2-year first cycle candidate diploma and a 2-year second cycle diploma, called licenciate diploma) was realized much later, in 1984-1985. The Bologna Process (the term refers to agreements between European countries to ensure comparability in the standards and quality of higher-education qualifications, see Keeling, 2006) led the reorganization of the educational structure of criminology programmes in a first cycle (Bachelor level) and second cycle (Master level) in 2004.[[14]](#endnote-14)In Dutch-taught criminology programmes (both in the region of Flanders and in the Brussels region), academic programmes in criminology are available from the first year of the bachelor’s course (the BA programme takes three years, the MA programme takes one year). Erasmus Belgica facilitates exchange between Dutch-speaking and French-speaking students.

While criminology programmes have been interdisciplinary since their conception it is remarkable that more attention than ever is placed on methodology (both qualitative and quantitative research methods). An important aspect of the criminology programmes is the intership. Students develop skills to function as a criminologist. Courses in English have entered the Bachelor and Master programmes. In French-taught criminology programmes (Brussels and Wallonia), two-year’s Master programmes are offered and no separate BA programmes in criminology exist. Some readers may even remember that different international Master Programmes existed (e.g. at Ghent University and Leuven University).[[15]](#endnote-15) There remain many challenges regarding internationalization.

***Outflow: where will our criminologists work?***

Belgian criminology schools are characterized by the high number of students. In 2001, the **Flemish Interuniversity Council** (VLIR) wrote in its visitation of the Flemish Criminology Schools that there had been an ‘explosive growth of the number of students’ in the first years, especially in Ghent (VLIR, 2001). Flemish criminology schools represent a quantitatively important part of the European criminological educational landscape and are among the largest in Europe (Daems et al, 2013), and the numbers keep rising. In 2013-2014, a total of 492 students enrolled[[16]](#endnote-16) in the first bachelor year of Criminology in Leuven, Brussels and Ghent[[17]](#endnote-17). In 2017-2018, Ghent, Brussels and Leuven counted 743 newly enrolled Criminology-students[[18]](#endnote-18). In Ghent University, many of these students are female (about 70% on average) and of relatively homogenic ethnic (Belgian) background. Although a systematic analysis is lacking today, we sense that the attractiveness of criminology for students has been rising steadily ever since the Dutroux case in the late 90s and since the rising attention of policymakers to terrorism. This also implies that a lot of criminologists enter the job market. But in which segments of the job market will Belgian criminologists end up? We know that traditionally, criminologists can work in many sectors (police, judicial sector, social sector, private sector, research, policy-related,..). In 2018, an internal analysis was conducted at Ghent University in which alumni of the past ten years were asked to fill out a survey. The analysis showed that many students actually do not enter the job market immediately, but choose to start a second study to improve their chances at that job market.

After that, over half of them found a paid job within 5 months, the majority of them in a non-criminological professional field (37%), but also in the social sector (25%), the police (18%), policy (8%) and judicial sector (7%). This is on the one hand promising, as the outlook for criminology students is not extremely pessimistic, yet the large number of alumni that work in a non-criminological job is food for thought.

**Criminology is now no longer the only game in ‘Education Town’**

While we all acknowledge that crime and the social reaction towards crime are not necessarily studied by criminologists and that criminologists increasingly study other aspects of behavior than those that would typically fall under the umbrella of criminology, there is a significant development in Belgium. Due to societal evolutions, especially at the turn of the 21st century (see above), new programmes with strong links to criminology have been developed at several university colleges (e.g. the BA programme of social security at Vives in Kortrijk, Flanders and the BA programme of applied youth criminology, Karel de Grote Hogeschool, Antwerp) and at universities (e.g. master of security studies at the University of Antwerp and Public Governance & Management at Ghent University). This is remarkable: the establishment of university colleges (educational institutions geared towards practical professional training issuing BAs) and professional bachelor programmes should be an open invitation to established criminology programmes to rethink their role in the contemporary landscape and their relationships with practitioners and policymakers. Research is not exclusively related to universities. At university colleges, research is also increasingly becoming a part of the job.

**Coda: the kaleidoscope of criminology in Belgium**

Today, pluralism reigns in criminology in Belgium. Research is conducted on every aspect of ESC’s definition of criminology[[19]](#endnote-19). Does this mean that the different Belgian departments of criminology, and the National Institute for Criminology and Criminalistics no longer have their axes of gravity? Of course not. Criminological inquiries are mostly conducted in ‘research groups’, which are different entities within departments. These research groups have an increasing tendency to brand themselves using research lines, themes or topics of expertise or academic niches, e.g. human rights, policing, restorative and transitional justice, youth justice, juvenile delinquency, criminal policy, drug policy, penology, crime and the city, to name but a few, … [[20]](#endnote-20) . Some of these research lines overlap between institutions, which make sense because topics need to be studied from different points of view. They incorporate advances in quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods, they conduct research in traditional populations, hard to reach and stigmatized groups, … But the age of specialization may have unintended side effects. It becomes increasingly difficult to be a generalist, yet somehow we need to keep the overview. When criminologists will continue to specialize in an international branch of criminology, we may arrive at some critical point of ‘hyper-specialization’ and somewhere in that evolution, we may arrive at ‘speciation’ in Belgium[[21]](#endnote-21). In such a situation, the mutual understanding of schools of thought becomes increasingly difficult. Additionally, in the globalizing criminological society, criminologists may forget to translate their findings to the local communities. However, ‘criminological’ inquiries are not exclusively conducted by criminologists, and criminologists do a lot more than studying crime, deviance, and the social reaction towards crime and deviance. In the age of interdisciplinarity, issues of convergence and divergence also play in Belgian criminology. Criminological research converges to some extent within schools. While some scholars argue that criminology is in a preparadigmatic tradition (Lilly, Cullen and Ball, 2015), leading U.S. scholars have argued that this diversity should be treasured (Dooley, 2011). Therefore, we stimulate Belgian criminologists not only to take part in the larger globalized criminological enterprise but once in a while to return home and (re)discover the richness and diversity in Belgium. Are we still allowed to speak of a ‘Belgian’ criminology, and is this desirable in the age of identity politics? Criminology in Belgium is not exclusively conducted by ‘Belgian’ scholars and Belgian scholars contribute to knowledhe abroad.

**References and capita selecta[[22]](#endnote-22)**

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1. The former Dutch king Willem Van Oranje Nassau made the establishment of Ghent University, the institution hosting the 2019 ESC Conference, possible. Indirectly, he thus contributed to the geographical dispersion of criminological institutes in Belgium. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. This is still the case today if one takes a look at the variety of schools of thought which are present in contemporary Belgian criminological schools. For those who read Dutch, a more detailed description of early positivism can be found in De Bont (2001). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Jules Lejeune was not only Minister of Justice but alsolawyer and professor of law. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Emile vandervelde was a very important politician translating the social defense ideas into practice, like measuresaganist alcoholism, he supported prison reform and woman rights,. He was initially liberal, converted socialist, freemason, strong opponent of King Leopold II, lawyer and professor at the Free University of Brussels, He played an important role in the Belgian Socialist Party and helped to found the Labour and Socialist International in 1923, of which he was president until his death in 1938.. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. For an overview of the conferences of the International Society of Criminology (ISC) see: <http://www.isc-sic.org/web/fr/congres-mondial/world-congresses>. Belgian criminologists like Etienne De Greeff (first president of the scientific commission 1949-1950) and Tony Peters (1941-2012, president of the scientific commission 2000-2005) played a key role in the association. Today, Stephan Parmentier is secretary general of the ISC. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. It is also worth noticing that biology and genetics were not as developed as it is today. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. The Killers of Brabant (the Nijvel Gang), committed a series of violent attacks in the 1980s in the province Brabant, of which many took place in supermarkets. 28 people were killed as a result of the attacks. The case is still not solved today, and has been the subject of many theories (Dupont and Ponsaers, 1988; Ponsaers,2018) . [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. This is not to say that quantitative research did not exist in the 1980s. Belgian criminologists at different universities also conducted quantitative empirical research in the 1980s (e.g. and non-exhaustively, Paul Ponsaers, Patrick Hebberecht (1951-2015), Brice De Ruyver (1954-2017) at Ghent University, Jaak Van Kerckvoorde (1943-1994), Lode Walgrave and Johan Goethals at Leuven University, Christian Eliaerts, Sonja Snacken at the Free University of Brussels, Michel Born at Liège University, …). At virtually all Belgian universities, sources of biases and selectivity in the criminal justice system, were important research topics. Belgian criminology has especially paid attention to the relationship between, crime, criminalization and socially vulnerable groups who are mainly subject of this selectivity. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Danniau, F. (2017) "Faculteit Rechtsgeleerdheid in cijfers." UGentMemorie.

[www.ugentmemorie.be/artikel/faculteit-rechtsgeleerdheid-in-cijfers](http://www.ugentmemorie.be/artikel/faculteit-rechtsgeleerdheid-in-cijfers) [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. The Federal Crime Victim Survey was an instrument that informed criminologists on the dark and grey numbers of hidden crimes. The first Belgian federal victim survey dates from 1997. By 2010, it was (temporarily) abandoned for a combination of financial and political reasons. It has been revived in 2018. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. It is worth mentioning that two Belgian journals exist: La Revue de droit penal et de criminologie (in French), established 1907, and Panopticon (in Dutch), established in 1979. Besides that, Dutch-speaking criminologists also publish in the Dutch Journal of Criminology, the Journal of Cultural Criminology, and other Dutch journals. French-speaking criminologists have always had a wide platform because French is more widely spoken than Dutch. Other, more recent journals which focused on the translation of criminological research for practicioners and policy makers have unfortunately vanished due to the pressure of publishing in international journals. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Some Belgian scholars have made their careers outside Belgium, some examples are Mathieu Deflem (U.S), Hilde Tubex (Australia),Ronny Lippens (U.K.), … [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. E.g. Belspo, Ministry of the Interior/Justice [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. <https://www.belgium.be/en/education/european_harmonisation> [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Very recently, a new initiative is launched: the International Research’s Master of criminology at Rotterdam University, in which Ghent University participates <https://www.internationalmastercriminology.eu/> [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. This figure represents the ‘new’ students, who enrolled for the first time and thus excludes those who had to re-enrol. Data from KUL were found at <https://www.kuleuven.be/prodstudinfo/index/50000050.html>; data from Ghent University are based on internal analyses by Luc Lammens. We could not find any online information on the enrollments at the Free University Brussels. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. KUL (Leuven University): 160; Ghent University: 264; Free University of Brussels: 68 [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. KUL (Leuven University): 257; Ghent University: 384; Free University of Brussels: 102 [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. The term criminology, as used in the ESC Constitution, refers to all scholarly, scientific and professional knowledge concerning the explanation, prevention, control and treatment of crime and delinquency, offenders and victims, including the measurement and detection of crime, legislation and the practice of criminal law, and law enforcement, judicial, and correctional systems. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. An elaborated reproduction would go beyond the scope of this article. However, the different research groups clearly provide this information on their websites. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. The term is derived from evolutionary biology, where it is used to refer to the emergence of new species, who can no longer interbreed. Here we use the term on a figurative way. It means that criminological schools no longer talk to eachother. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Why would one suggest ‘capita selecta’ at the end of a small article on criminology in Belgium? First of all, it was used by us to get an overview. Although far from complete, we made explicit use of existing Festschrifts (Libri Amicorum) to get a first insight in topics studied by Belgian scholars who left their marks on contemporary criminology today, i.e. without whom contemporary criminology would have looked different. There are many brilliant articles on topics and persons in such works, just like in overview works, published at the occasion of a department or school’s anniversary, which I also consulted. These works are of great value if your job is to squeeze more than a century’s work in a nutshell. A more systematic way of studying the evolution of Belgian criminology could be done in several ways, e.g. by systemizing the PhD studies by topic, by studying the journals in which Belgian criminologists publish their works, and last but not least by listening to the rich narratives of Belgian criminologists themselves. One such an example is the European Oral History Project: <https://www.esc-eurocrim.org/index.php/activities/ecoh>. Several Belgian criminologists have been interviewed. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)