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## 18.5 Museums and movements in the Belgian countryside

Room 203

*Chair: Leen van Molle*

### 18.51 Chantal Bisschop – The Flemish rural movement on the move, 1960s–1970s

The sixties were for Flanders, as for the rest of Western Europe, a period of quick and profound societal changes. The Flemish countryside in particular was changing into a post-productivist and multifunctional area. Furthermore, new social movements were emerging all over the Western World.

At the same time, the oldest and nearly monopolistic farmers' organisation of Belgium, the catholic *Boerenbond* transformed itself, splitting up into a highly specialised farmer's league and a broad rural movement in which non-farming inhabitants of the countryside were expected to play an equally important role. How should we understand this drastic change? Is it, from an international comparative perspective, as unique as the *Boerenbond* itself postulates?

Initially the idea was to modernise the farmers' organisation so that it could withstand the rapidly changing farming sector. Spurred by its economic divisions and inspired by the women and youth organisations that had already opened their doors for non- agricultural members, the concept of a broader rural movement with local rural guilds (*Landelijke Gilden*) was born.

By use of a variety of oral and archival sources we will present an in-depth investigation of the initial objectives of the upper ranks of the rural movement, their (international) sources of inspiration and the different strategies that were used to achieve their goals. This range of ideas will be compared by the actual functioning of the rural movement in its early years.

**Chantal Bisschop** (b. Bruges, 1984) studied Modern History at the Catholic University of Leuven (K.U.Leuven) in Belgium and the François Rabelais University of Tours in France. She also obtained an academic teachers degree. For her master's dissertation on 'A history of underwear: performance, meaning, and identity (Flanders 1930-2006)' she recently received the Johanna Naber Award from Aletta and the Dutch Association for Women's History. For the Leuven-based Centre for Agrarian History (CAG) she coordinated the Flemish-Dutch exposition 'Supermarket Europe: 50 years of agriculture and food'. Since May 2008 she is preparing a doctoral thesis on *The rural movement in Flanders* at the Interfaculty Centre for Agrarian History (ICAG) of the K.U.Leuven. She published about the history of underwear in the Dutch yearbook for women's history and collaborate on the chapters of agricultural organisations and the ministry of agriculture in 'Sources for the study of contemporary Belgium, nineteenth to twenty-first century'.

### 18.52 Rien Emmery – The 'Year of the Village' (1978) in Flanders: scenes from a Christian-Democrat tragedy

As one of the most densely populated and industrialised regions of Europe, Flanders has developed a very ambiguous relationship with its countryside over the course of the twentieth century, especially following the Second World War. As a result of agricultural modernisation and increased mobility, the rural sphere increasingly opened up to economic and social functions other than agriculture, such as industry, housing and recreation. The emergence of this 'post-productivist' countryside spurred a hegemonic struggle in which several societal actors competed for the use of the rural space. Especially the *Christelijke Volkspartij* (CVP, the Flemish Christian-democratic party) and its associated social and cultural organisations advocated the countryside as a healthy, peaceful and generally idyllic environment. For several decades, the CVP initiated incentives to promote housing, economic development and recreation in the countryside. However, nearing the end of the 1970s, the desired rural amenities were visibly harmed by a continuing process of what turned out to be unrelenting urbanisation.

Mimicking the structure of the classical Greek tragedy, my paper will argue that the 'Year of the Village' – a governmental campaign in 1978 officially aimed at motivating individuals,

organisations and village authorities to assume an active stance in the ongoing process of rural restructuring – was actually an attempt by the Flemish Christian-democratic party to turn the tide, reshape their dominant representation of the countryside and even ‘ruralise’ Flemish society as a whole, with the intent to prevent further urbanisation of the countryside. The ‘Year of the Village’ still relied heavily on the well-established and popular imagery of the rural idyll, but now mainly as a discursive strategy to appeal to the general public. The ultimate goal was not just protecting the countryside from unrelenting urbanisation, but rather the implementation of nation-wide spatial and social policies reminiscent of ‘traditional’ rural community. However, several other actors concerning themselves with the countryside tried to ‘hijack’ the campaign and call attention to their own view of rurality. In short, the ‘Year of the Village’ represents an exceptional case-study to assess the twentieth-century hegemonic struggle within the Flemish countryside.

**Rien Emmery** studied history at Ghent University (2001-2005) and has published several books and articles on the political history of Belgium, specifically Prince-Regent Charles and the Belgian Royal Question. Currently, he is affiliated with the research unit ‘Modernity & Society, 1800-2000’ at the University of Leuven. He is preparing his PhD within the framework of the project ‘*Paradoxical rurality. Dwelling in rural Flanders, 1948-1978*’, funded by the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO), which is an ‘Associated Project’ of the housing pillar of EUWOL, the Collaborative Research Project within the European Science Foundation’s EUROCORES Programme ‘Inventing Europe’. Rien Emmery is also the representative for University of Leuven at the Belgian Society for Contemporary History (*Belgische Vereniging voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*) and a member of the editorial board of its publication, the *Mededelingenblad*.