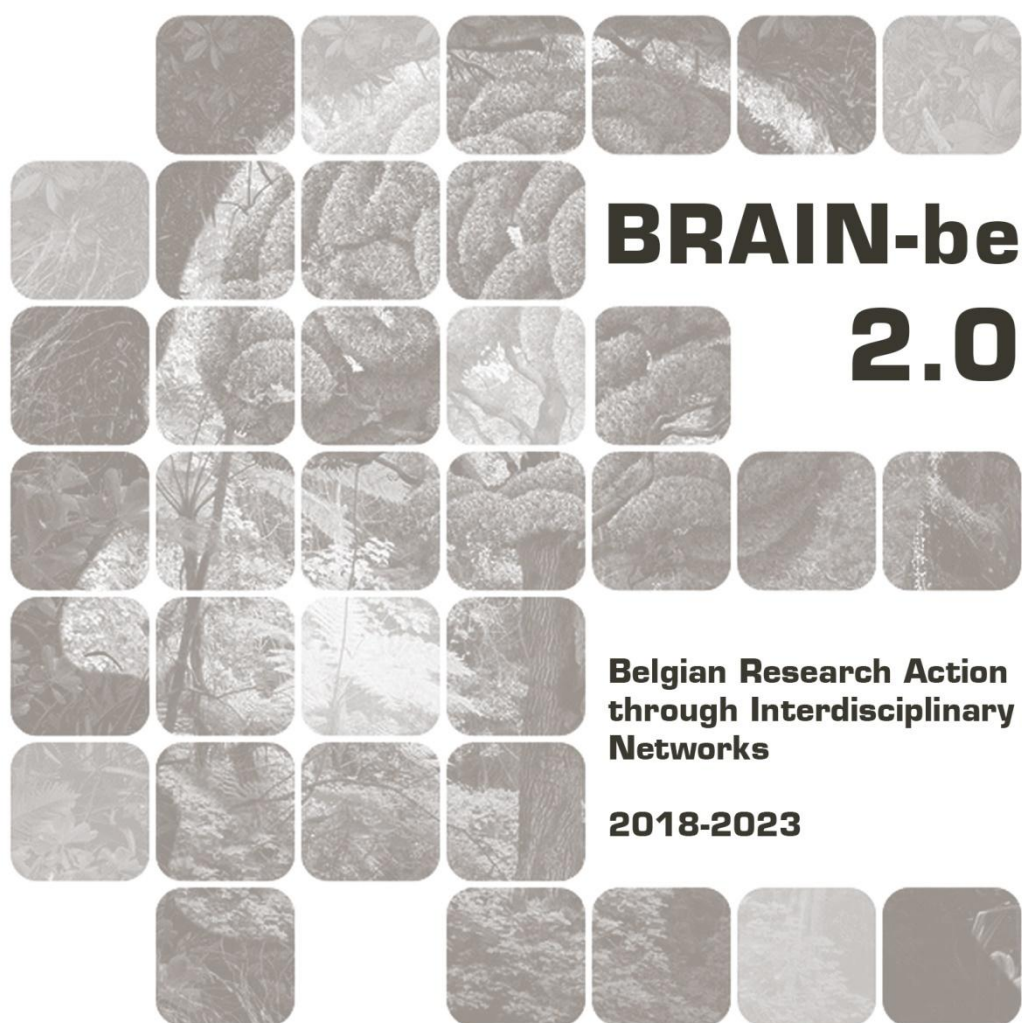


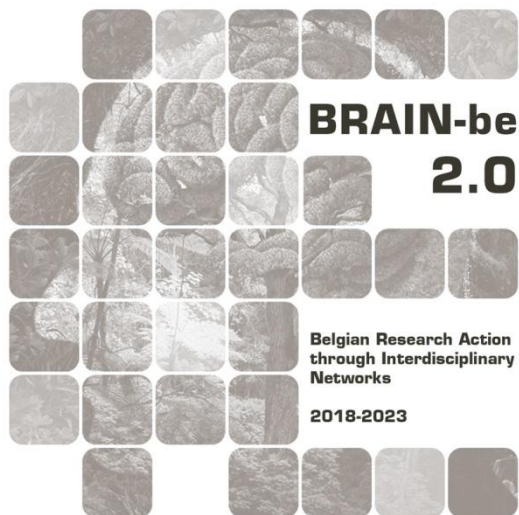


OUTLAW

Outsiders and the Law. Uncovering Criminal Justice Trajectories in Nineteenth Century Belgium

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Pillar 2: Heritage science



NETWORK PROJECT

OUTLAW

**Outsiders and the Law. Uncovering Criminal Justice Trajectories in
Nineteenth Century Belgium**

Contract - **B2/212/P2/OUTLAW**

FINAL REPORT

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ABSTRACT

OUTLAW pursued two intertwined ambitions. The first was archival and heritage-oriented: to unlock and promote the Belgian prison archives held by the State Archives, and in particular the so-called ‘registers of moral bookkeeping’. Introduced in the mid-nineteenth century, these registers document the family background, education, criminal record, behaviour and physical condition of roughly 120,000 men and women sentenced to at least three months' imprisonment in Belgium between 1855 and 1924. The State Archives digitised all 623 surviving registers and, through a citizen-science model involving 50 volunteers, built a searchable database of 27 fields. The project produced c. 120,000 freely accessible scans and a database of 122,225 convicts, available via the Agatha search engine and, as open data, through SODHA and CESSDA.

OUTLAW is, on the other hand, a historical-criminological research project that focuses on the social profiles and criminal justice trajectories of persons confronted with the law in nineteenth-century Belgium, in order to determine how different forms of social vulnerability (gender, age, class, migration background etc.) shape uses, practices and experiences of justice and to give voice to underrepresented groups of ‘outsiders’ in history. The empirical research confirms the project’s central hypothesis: individuals’ encounters with the criminal justice system differed fundamentally depending on their social profile and on the social capital they were able to mobilise. Across the successive arenas of the penal chain, people identified as social ‘outsiders’ were consistently treated differently, and generally more harshly, than those considered part of the ‘established’ population. Social vulnerability thus shaped the outcomes of contact with the law at nearly every stage of the judicial process. The research, however, also shows that even individuals occupying highly vulnerable positions within the social hierarchy were not without recourse.

Historical Criminology - Prison History – Prison Archives - Social Vulnerability – Citizen Science

1. INTRODUCTION

People are equal before the law. This principle is strongly embedded in the judicial doctrine of the Enlightenment, and for that matter also in the liberal Belgian constitution. In practice, however, justice administration does not always follow that rule: some people appear to be more equal before the law than others. Investigating the social profiles and penal trajectories of persons confronted with criminal justice in 19th-century Belgium, this historical-criminological research project aims to determine how different dimensions of social vulnerability (gender, class, age, migration background...) shape the workings of criminal justice. Using this intersectional approach, OUTLAW examined how various social vulnerabilities affect uses, practices and experiences of justice. By reconstructing the untold stories of vulnerable 'outsiders' in their dealings with the law, this project aimed to give voice to largely underrepresented groups in history. To achieve this, it drew on the extraordinary rich collections of judicial and prison records kept by the Belgian State Archives, that provide unique access to the voices and experiences of 'ordinary' men and women in the past.

OUTLAW also highlights the prison archives, and in particular the so-called 'moral bookkeeping' of Belgian prisons. By making the data in this archival series accessible and freely available, the project unlocks its potential as a valuable resource for both researchers and the wider public.

2. STATE OF THE ART AND OBJECTIVES

2.1. Increasing the accessibility, the scientific exploitation and general use of Belgian prison archives, in particular the registers of moral bookkeeping

In Belgium, thanks to the State Archives and the pioneering work of former Director Karel Velle in particular, we dispose of important collections of judicial and prison archives. In recent years, nearly all Belgian prison archives have been transferred to the State Archives repositories and made accessible through published finding aids. This has resulted in the opening up of over one kilometre of new prison records and coverage of the entire Belgian territory. The project aims to pursue this important work and achieve another significant step forward in promoting access to and use of these particularly rich sources.

Judicial and penitentiary archives offer a rare insight into day-to-day historical practices missing in other sources, and into the speech ordinary witnesses and suspects used to describe their own experiences. These sources are not only of great interest to social historians, but also provide a wealth of information to social scientists, heritage professionals, genealogists and other interested members of the public. Yet judicial and penitentiary archives still remain relatively under-explored. Both in Belgium and abroad, digitisation and data mining efforts have proven to provide crucial stimuli, opening up a large array of new perspectives for historical research. The resulting 'rediscovery' of the unique richness of judicial archives has led to the revival of an older tradition of historical work using these sources, such as the seminal works of Farge (1974) and Hobsbawn (1969). At the same time, social historians have been developing innovative new storytelling and narratological techniques to reconstruct the experiences and voices of vulnerable groups.

In order to further promote these recent advances and innovations in the Belgian context and to increase the accessibility of prison archives, project OUTLAW invested in the digitisation of the complete collection of the so-called 'moral bookkeeping' of Belgian prisons, kept in the various archival repositories of the State Archives throughout the country. These registers were introduced

into the Belgian prison system in the mid-19th century and contain numerous notes on the family background, education, criminal record, behaviour and physical condition of the approximately 120,000 male and female inmates who were sentenced to a prison term of at least three months in Belgium between 1855 and 1924. The scanned images are then published online and integrated into the State Archives' search engine, so that they can be accessed by a wide audience comprising researchers, local historians and genealogists alike. The online availability of the images has the added advantage that the fragile paper documents will no longer need to be consulted on a regular basis and subjected to excessive use.

The digital accessibility of the collection will above all be achieved through a database, that functions as an access point to the digitised images of the moral bookkeeping, but also as a starting point for future research. Within this context, OUTLAW is a citizen science project. The scanned images are transcribed by volunteers and the relevant data of c. 120,000 male and female convicted persons is entered in a database. This database will offer an unprecedented overview of the convicted prison population in Belgium during the second half of the nineteenth and the first quarter of the twentieth century. All data is integrated into the digital repository of the State Archives and is made available online to the public for free.

A bilingual (French/Dutch) research and valorisation portal for Belgian prison archives (19th-20th c.) will be made available through the website of the State Archives to significantly increase exposure of these collections to scholars and the general public, to promote research into the history of the Belgian prison system and to demonstrate how storytelling techniques can bring the lives of 19th- and 20th-century 'criminals' back to life.

2.2. Uncovering the hidden experiences and voices of marginalised groups in history and understanding outsiders' encounters with the law

One of the objectives of the project is to uncover the experiences and voices of social groups and individuals who remain underrepresented in historiography: the poor, migrants and minorities, and other marginalised groups. As these different groups share a similar fragile/vulnerable social position, we propose to designate them as 'outsiders'. In line with growing public and official concern about socio-economic inequality and social exclusion in today's globalised world, social historians are recently putting these issues on the research agenda again, both in the Low Countries and abroad. This recent trend contributes to reviving and renewing a long tradition in social history of 'history from below' and 'microhistory'.

This project ties in with recent attempts to renew social-historical explorations of the everyday lives of persons from the lower sections and margins of society who ran into the law. It focuses on a key period of socio-economic change, the long nineteenth century, when European society rapidly transformed from a preindustrial to an industrial one, generating new forms of social vulnerability and exclusion. It aims to retrieve, investigate and interpret the lost voices of the 'ordinary' individuals and social groups who experienced and shaped those sweeping social changes. In order to realize this, it proposes an innovative twofold approach to the issue of social vulnerability. First, it uses the notion of 'social capital' to emphasize the crucial role played by social networks in shaping individuals' experiences of inequality and exclusion, and second, it uses the Gender Studies concept of 'intersectionality', to investigate the complex intersections between gender, class, age, ethnicity, etc. in shaping individuals' experiences of social vulnerability and exclusion.

Studying marginal populations' experiences and voices through the lens of their encounters with the law also contributes to the development of the new field of historical criminology. Combining the historical methods of 'history from below' and microhistory with a socio-legal 'law-in-action'-perspective (Schiff, 1976), the project will produce valuable new insights into the actual functioning of the criminal justice system, processes of criminalization and possible practices of discrimination in nineteenth-century Belgium. We fully and systematically implement the 'law-in-action' approach by considering individuals' encounters with the law as part of large trajectories and thus following them through the various stages of the criminal justice chain.

At each of these stages, we want to examine how exactly criminal justice responses, i.e. practices of prosecution, indictment, trial and punishment, were shaped by the interplay between factors such as gender, class, age, religion and migration background of individual suspects and offenders. As the Dutch Gender & Crime Project (coord. M. van der Heijden, Leiden University) has amply demonstrated, gender is a crucial category to take into account when examining both vulnerability for crime and judicial outcomes. Ethnicity and religion, at the centre of public and official concerns today, can of course neither be lost out of sight. Further, we propose to 'bring class back in' to the analyses, building on pioneering work on 'class justice' such as the studies of Jütte (1995), Linebaugh (1991) and Shoemaker (1991), for example, but optimising the operationalisation of the concept of social class. Using an approach of intersectionality, we propose to systematically examine class in its intersections with gender, age and ethnicity. This ties in with a central objective of historical criminology to bring lessons from the past to current debates, in this case the currently much debated issues of police or legal discrimination of minorities, ethnic profiling, racism, etc.

Further, from a dynamic 'history from below' perspective, we do not only look at the (differential?) treatment of arrested, prosecuted and imprisoned outsiders by the criminal justice system, but also examine the agency of these individuals: how they reacted to and negotiated criminal justice outcomes, and how they used courts and prisons to their own ends (as complainants, for example). Here we put forward the novel analytical concept of the 'arena', drawing on new work on agency and resistance, to shift the attention towards interactions and negotiations between outsiders and criminal justice officials at the various stages of the criminal justice chain.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Increasing the accessibility, the scientific exploitation and general use of Belgian prison archives, in particular the registers of moral bookkeeping (coordinator: State Archives Ghent)

Digitisation of the registers of moral bookkeeping

The first objective of the State Archives was to digitise all preserved registers of the so-called moral bookkeeping of the Belgian prisons. This work package began with the compilation of a detailed overview of all surviving registers. To this end, all available inventories of prison archives were examined. In addition, enquiries were made to the heads of the Flemish and Walloon State Archives. Where there was any doubt as to whether certain documents actually constituted moral accounting records, an on-site verification was carried out.

The digitisation was carried out internally within the State Archives. For efficiency reasons, it was decided that the registers from the Flemish repositories would be digitised at the State Archives in

Ghent, whilst the registers from the Brussels and Walloon repositories would be digitised in the scanning studio of DIVA (the Digitisation and Digital Valorisation Service of the State Archives) in Brussels.

The technical specifications that the scans had to meet in order to be sustainably integrated into the digital repository and the search engine of the State Archives (e.g. TIFF file format, file name, numbering, links to online inventories, quality checks, etc.) were discussed with DIVA.

The digitisation was carried out largely with the help of student workers, assisted by the project staff member, who drew up scanning instructions and closely monitored the work.

Finally, following a thorough check of the scan quality and the metadata, the scans were transferred to the digital archiving service of the State Archives, stored in the digital repository and integrated into the search engine.

Moral bookkeeping database

The second objective was creating a database containing information on the approximately 120,000 male and female convicts listed in the registers of the moral bookkeeping.

First, in consultation with all project members, a selection was made of the data to be collected on each prisoner. In doing so, it was necessary to strike the right balance between research relevance and practical feasibility, bearing in mind that, in principle, all data could be relevant to certain research. Ultimately, the following list of 27 substantive fields was used:

Number	Fields	Data entry type
1	Number Moral report	Verbatim transcription
2	Surname	Verbatim transcription
3	First name	Verbatim transcription
4	Gender	Drop-down menu
5	Date of birth	DD / MM / YYYY
6	Legitimate child / Illegitimate child / Foundling	Drop-down menu
7	Marital status	Drop-down menu
8	Number of children	Drop-down menu
9	Place of birth	Verbatim transcription
10	Last place of residence	Verbatim transcription
11	Occupation	Verbatim transcription
12	Did he/she work for themselves or for others?	Drop-down menu
13	Means of support	Drop-down menu
14	Previous convictions	Drop-down menu
15	Offences committed	Verbatim transcription
16	Place where the offences were committed	Verbatim transcription
17	Year in which the offences were committed	YYYY
18	Date of arrival	DD / MM / YYYY
19	Pardons, sentence variations and sentence reductions?	Yes / No
20	Prison offences and penalties imposed?	Yes / No
21	Date of departure	DD / MM / JJJJ

22	Reason of departure	Drop-down menu
23	Place of residence after departure or transfer	Verbatim transcription
24	Civilian or military	Drop-down menu
25	Prison labour	Verbatim transcription
26	Religion	Drop-down menu
27	Comments	Free tekst

Figure 1: List of selected data fields

The next step was to find the most suitable tool for data entry by volunteers. Since no budget had been allocated for this, the Dutch crowdsourcing platform Vele Handen was quickly ruled out. The MADOC platform from the Ghent Centre for Digital Humanities was also briefly considered, but this only works with IIIF-enriched scans, a technology that is not (yet) supported by the Belgian State Archives. Inspiration was also drawn from similar citizen science projects such as S.O.S. Antwerpen (Ghent University), Getuigenissen (VUB) and PARDONS (State Archives-UCL). Ultimately, it was decided to use an accessible Excel template or a Google spreadsheet, depending on the volunteer's preference.

A workflow was then drawn up for making the registers accessible. This process took place in five phases:

1. Basic Registration [volunteers]	✓ Raw data entry ✓ For each register, the volunteer receives an Excel template and the corresponding scans ✓ If there is any doubt or uncertainty regarding certain data, this is highlighted in yellow ✓ Once completed, the volunteer returns the completed Excel file to the project member
2. Initial check [project member State Archives]	✓ Form: check that the instructions have been followed regarding notation, use of abbreviations, etc. ✓ Content: check and correct the transcriptions and drop-down menus (highlighted in yellow by a volunteer + random sample)
3. Data processing [project member State Archives + UGent team member]	✓ Data processing and enrichment ✓ Standardisation ✓ Translation (e.g. place names, occupations) ✓ Categorisation (e.g. offences) ✓ Automated where possible
4. Second check [project member State Archives]	✓ Content: check that data processing has been completed in full ✓ Form: check that technical requirements have been met
5. Integration into search engines [project member State Archives + DIVA]	✓ Transfer of all data to DIVA ✓ Integration of data into the State Archives' search engine (Agatha – Analysis of Records)

Figure 2: the work flow process

For the volunteer component, a test group of 12 people was launched in the summer of 2022. Three volunteers came to Ghent in person, whilst the other nine took part remotely from home. During the trial months, they were regularly asked for their feedback and suggestions so that improvements and adjustments could be made to the template and the selected data fields.

Starting at the end of 2022, efforts were made to adopt a more systematic approach to volunteer recruitment. For this the help of Histories vzw, the Flemish support organisation for heritage volunteers in Flanders and Brussels, was called upon. It was decided to organise recruitment on a regional basis and to seek partnerships with local heritage organisations, such as a Erfgoedcel, a genealogy society or a local historical society. After all, the pilot phase had shown that volunteers prefer to work on records from a prison in their own region. Collaboration with local partners is also an asset when it comes to promoting and sharing the project's results.

In the end, three regional partnerships were established, with Erfgoedcel Dijk92, Erfgoedcel Noorderkempen and the Merksplas Prison Museum. As a result, the number of volunteers grew to 50. Initially, the plan was to launch a recruitment campaign in Wallonia as well, but the existing network of volunteers was willing to transcribe the records from the Walloon prisons and was large enough to make all the records accessible within the set timeframe.

A number of tools and resources were developed to support and guide the volunteers.

- ✓ Instructions – the project member wrote a manual to data entry.
- ✓ Thesauri – with the help of in-house volunteers reference lists were made to help volunteers decipher historical place names, occupations, offences and prison labour. These lists were based on the existing thesauri in the State Archives' search engine, but were constantly updated with new data from the registers that had been entered. These reference lists were made available on the OUTLAW project website.
- ✓ Helpline – Volunteers could contact the project member of the State Archives if they had any questions. To prevent her from being inundated with too many straightforward transcription queries, an accessible [Q&A forum](#) was set up on Padlet. On this online bulletin board volunteers could post their questions in an accessible way and help each other. They also posted interesting cases and facts, which deserved further study. It created a vibrant online community and boosted team spirit in a group that mainly worked remotely. As a token of gratitude the team of the State Archives organized several informal events for the volunteers to keep them informed on the progress of the project and to give them a chance to meet each other in person.

The data that the volunteers had entered in the database was checked by the project staff member to ensure compliance with the prescribed notation, use of abbreviations and data columns. Additionally, the transcriptions were examined for content accuracy and were corrected as needed.

In the end the data needed to be transferred to the DIVA staff so it could be integrated in Agatha, the online search environment of the State Archives.

Online portal for prison archives

Thirdly, an online portal for prison archives that is integrated in the State Archives' website will be launched.

In collaboration with the State Archives' Communications department, which is responsible for the organisation's website, the format and structure of this online platform is determined so that it can be integrated into the State Archives' website.

This portal will allow visitors to find a comprehensive overview of the history of the Belgian prison system, including the institutional framework and its changes through time, the various actors in the penitentiary system, evolutions in prison regimes from the mid-19th-century cellular confinement to the current community regime that appeared after WWII. Attention is also paid to the detainees themselves. Which categories were distinguished? What trajectories did they follow? Which prison section did they end up in and which regime did they undergo? The criminal status and the position in the judicial procedure play a role here (suspect, indicted, accused, convicted), as well as gender, age, profession or migration background (women, juveniles, military personnel, vagrants, etc.). The portal will present the various archival series found in the prison archives. The multiple possibilities to explore these sources from socio-historical, genealogical, criminological perspective and even cultural perspective will be explained. The website portal will also integrate information about related judicial archives and demonstrate the interrelationships between judicial and prison records. And it will show visitors how storytelling techniques can be applied to the data in order to uncover and share the untold stories of 19th-century 'criminals', drawing on the expertise and input from the UGent team regarding the application of storytelling/narratological techniques for the reconstruction and sharing of voices of vulnerable groups. Finally, the portal will refer visitors to the search engines of the State Archives where the digitised prison records are made available to the public and the finding aids of all prison archives can be found, as well as the database of the registers of moral bookkeeping.

3.2. Understanding social vulnerability: Exploring outsiders' encounters with the law (coord. Ghent University)

The OUTLAW project includes a UGent PhD research project at the crossroads of history and criminology. This PhD project examines and explains the apparent inconsistencies in the prosecution and punishment of offenders. Its primary objective is to deepen our understanding of the biases present in the everyday administration of justice and the negotiations between the defendants and justice officials in late nineteenth-century Belgium. This to answer the following central research question: 'Why were the criminal justice trajectories of property offenders in Belgium so different between 1870 and 1910, when the law purported to treat everyone equally?' The project adopts a historical criminological approach to identify the main factors contributing to the diverging of criminal justice trajectories and the differential treatment by the justice system. While it is well-documented that the discretionary powers of justice officials expanded significantly throughout the nineteenth century, the specific circumstances under which judges would exhibit leniency or severity in their decisions remain unclear. In other words, the reasons for the differential treatment of individuals charged with similar crimes are not yet fully understood.

The research project examines how the intersection of various social characteristics of offenders shaped their criminal justice trajectories and the strategies that they employed to negotiate judicial outcomes. It hypothesises that criminal justice trajectories were not solely shaped by the nature of the offence, but were also, and perhaps more significantly, influenced by other factors such as the defendants' social profile, economic, cultural, and social capital, negotiation strategies, and previous encounters with the law.

To ensure that the PhD project is feasible, it focuses on property crimes. In accordance with Peter King's work, property crimes are defined as 'lawbreaking acts involving both the damage to property (e.g. arson or animal maiming) and the appropriation of goods, money or services through direct theft or indirect means such as fraud, forgery, or extortion.' (King, 2000) This research focus is particularly relevant because historians have mostly focused on violent crimes, although property crimes were one of the most common types of offence. The historical studies that do examine property crimes tend to focus on the criminal behaviour only, overlooking the trial, punishment and justice trajectories of the offenders. This project proposes an alternate approach by examining how the interplay of various social characteristics of the offenders (including gender, social class, marital status, access to social networks, etc.), their negotiation strategies, and previous encounters with the law shaped judicial outcomes.

The project conceptualises the criminal justice system as a multileveled arena. Each level had its own distinct logic and dynamics, particular actors, and required specific negotiation strategies (Scott, 1990; Seymour, 2012). Each player in the arena has their own interpretation of justice and stakes in the trial. By conceptualising the justice system as a multileveled arena, the central research question can be subdivided into three intertwined research strands, each corresponding to a specific level in the judicial chain. Firstly, the project focuses on the mechanisms of informal criminalisation at the neighbourhood level, i.e. the social construction of behaviour as criminal, as well as communities' tolerance thresholds, and individuals' pathways to the courtroom. Secondly, at the level of the court, the project examines the prosecution and punishment of offenders, and the negotiation strategies they employed. Lastly, the study delves into the imprisonment and release of convicts. This threefold analysis allows to unravel both the influence of various social characteristics of the offenders on criminal justice trajectories and the varying degrees of agency they had at each stage of the judicial chain.

The neighbourhood level is the starting point of the analysis, because scholars have shown that processes of informal criminalisation largely took place outside the justice system, in community networks. Through the use of various informal social control mechanisms, such as gossip, individuals were initially labelled as 'moral delinquents' before being formally prosecuted and brought to court (Garrioch, 1986). The primary objective at this level is to find out who was brought to court, and by whom. The project suggests that prosecuted property offenders tended to be young low or unskilled and single male workers. As numerous scholars have already argued across various crime categories, a disproportionate number of defendants and inmates belonged to the lower social classes. This disparity can be explained by referring to the field of historical life course criminology, which posits that individuals become embroiled in criminality when alternative non-criminal life choices are less appealing. According to this perspective, involvement in criminal activities is therefore particularly enticing for people living on the margins.

The PhD project also examines why individuals were (not) prosecuted. The project suggests that few offenders appeared in court, as conflicts were typically resolved informally, without the involvement of the justice system. However, victims often tried to force the perpetrators into paying compensations by involving justice officials and, once compensated, they would withdraw their case, avoiding any official trial. Offenders also actively tried to avoid a lawsuit, negotiating with victims by returning stolen items, for instance. These observations raise the question of why certain individuals still ended up in court. In most instances, formal prosecutions arose after attempts at infrajudicial

resolution of the conflict had failed. Victims would involve the justice system to recover their losses and simultaneously restore the social and proprietary order, reaffirm social norms and moral values, and establish their personal reputation.

Next, at the level of the courtroom, the project examines the impact of the social profile and social position of offenders on the formal prosecution process at the courtroom level. The project suggests that various social characteristics of the offenders, including gender, age, marital status, and birthplace, influenced their prosecution and punishment considerably. One of the hypotheses is that highly mobile people were treated more harshly, as mobility was closely linked with crime. In other words, individuals without a fixed residence and stable attachment to a community, were less likely to receive any leniency. The project further hypothesises that a lack of economic, cultural and social capital, limited access to social networks, strongly affected the way individuals were treated by the justice system. Those who could mobilise the help of family, friends, or neighbours during the investigation and/or the trial, indicating that they were well integrated and lived in a neighbourly manner, were treated more leniently than ‘unattached’ or unanchored individuals who lived on the margins and violated social and moral codes and norms. It is expected that social ‘outsiders’ were punished more harshly for property offences compared to ‘established’ and well- integrated residents.

However, the social background of the defendants did not exclusively determine judicial outcomes. Scholars often compare trials to stage performances in which different ideas, norms, and values were put on display (Seymour, 2012). Since the project considers the courtroom as an arena, the sentencing process was equally shaped by the negotiations between the different parties, including the defendants, the victims, and the justice officials. Consequently, the project examines the discursive practices and narrative strategies employed by the offenders in their negotiations with the justice officials. The dissertation shows how the defendants tried to negotiate judicial outcomes and to find out why and to what extent they strategically used ‘the language of power’. They used a wide range of negotiation strategies, ranging from immediate confession to the stubborn denial of all charges. Since the judges often expected the defendants to show remorse, those who confessed and expressed guilt were likely to be treated more leniently than who denied any involvement. Along with expressing guilt and remorse, defendants intentionally emphasised their vulnerable social position to evoke feelings of sympathy and compassion in the hopes of receiving a more lenient treatment.

At the level of the prison, the main research objective is to examine imprisonment as a social practice rather than simply a mechanical application of legal procedures. This approach enhances our understanding of the trajectory that led from the courtroom door to the prison’s threshold. Recently, historians have focused primarily on the social profile of the prisoners, challenging the view that the prison population was a socially homogeneous group (Génard, 2023). Nonetheless, how convicts entered prison remains a blind spot. Looking at the offenders at the doorstep of the prison provides an essential way of understanding the workings of the judicial chain. This approach allows us to examine the degree of trust (or lack thereof) that the justice system had in individuals who were sentenced to prison. In the literature on imprisonment, five types of entry into the prison can be distinguished: pre-trial or preventive detention, immediate arrest after conviction, delayed arrest after conviction, voluntary confinement after conviction, and substitute detention after conviction (Génard, 2023). The project examines the degree to which the social profile of prisoners differed across these various types of imprisonment. Which social characteristics determined the entry into prison, and why? Additionally, it studies the voluntary entry into prison and explains why some

convicts were not immediately detained following their conviction. The latter question is particularly relevant as it deals with the room for agency in the face of punishment. Once sentenced to imprisonment, going to prison was an obligation, but one that seemingly could be negotiated.

The second objective at this level is to study the release from prison, as this was an essential part of individuals' justice trajectories as well. The project specifically examines when and why individuals were released early. It suggests that access to social networks was just as important as social characteristics or exemplary behaviour in prison when it came to negotiating and securing leniency. Those prisoners who could not count on outside support had minimal chances of receiving early release. Furthermore, the project shows that inmates who could prove that they would successfully reintegrate into society, were more likely to be granted early release.

To answer these questions, the project connects court and prison archives. Linking court and prison records is an underexplored research strategy in the historiography of criminal justice. This complex and labour-intensive operation is only feasible at the limited scale of a small judicial arrondissement for which a complete and diverse corpus of judicial and prison archives is available. This is the case for the arrondissement of Bruges, that therefore constitutes the geographical scope of this research. The reconstruction of the negotiation processes in the successive arenas is based on the analysis of following archives for that arrondissement (kept in the Bruges State Archives): the archives of the correctional court and the archives of the Bruges prison.

The dynamics at the neighbourhood level are mainly analysed through a close reading of police reports and reports of the investigating magistrate, kept in the archives of the correctional court. These reports contain lots of declarations of neighbourhood inhabitants in which they problematize particular types of behaviour and groups. These declarations are therefore very informative for the process of defining moral and social outsiders at a grass-roots level. Next, for the arena of the courtroom, the archives of the correctional court are analysed both in a quantitative and qualitative way. Close reading of the case files inform us about the ways in which defendants used their social capital in court in order to get a lenient verdict. Quantitative analysis of the sentences shows to what extent courts judged different groups differently. Lastly, for the arena of the prison, the prison archives form the main source of information. Prison archives, more in particular the enrolment registers, contain detailed data about the convicts' social backgrounds. The moral bookkeeping registers moreover provide much information about the attitudes and behaviour of the convicts in prison.

Both quantitative and qualitative methods are used to analyse the corpus of interrelated judicial sources systematically. In order to ensure feasibility, the archival research will focus on six sample years (1868, 1879, 1883, 1890, 1902 and 1910). In order to be able to research the impact of social profile and social capital throughout the judicial, it is necessary to process the archives of the entire judicial chain in an integrated, quantitative way. By processing the decisions of successive authorities in the judicial chain, the project reconstructs these trajectories entirely. Moreover, all these different judicial sources contain information (gender, age, wealth, profession, migration background...) on the actors (accused, convicts etc.) involved, which are systematically integrated in a database. The relational nature of the database allows us to research links between the social profile of the people confronted with the law and the dynamics of decision-making throughout the judicial chain. In other words, the database enables us to test the main hypothesis of this project.

To fully understand the impact of social profile and social capital on judicial decision-making, a purely quantitative approach is not sufficient. A qualitative analysis is needed to uncover the strategies and voices of the criminalized outsiders. A close reading of the declarations of the criminalized outsiders sheds a light on their own rhetoric strategies and agency within the criminal justice system. The judicial archives do not only contain the voices and strategies of the ruling groups, but those of different categories of outsiders as well. The discourses of criminal justice professionals and criminalized outsiders are analysed using qualitative text analysis software (MAXQDA). Such software allows combining quantitative text analysis (counting word frequencies and combinations) with more in-depth qualitative discourse analysis of a large corpus of texts, thus distillation of the different voices and discursive strategies of all the actors involved.

This combination of methods is in line with the broader trend in crime and criminal justice history to move beyond the quantitative-qualitative opposition by linking valuable elements from both traditions. Quantitative analysis makes it possible to track down structures and processes that would remain hidden in a pure hermeneutic analysis. Qualitative analysis of the sources from the perspective of the actors involved is necessary to reconstruct their voices and agency.

4. SCIENTIFIC RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. State Archives Ghent

Digitisation of the registers of moral bookkeeping

At the start of the OUTLAW project, 587 registers of moral bookkeeping from 21 different prisons were identified. By the end of 2022, a member of the steering committee drew attention to the existence of 22 additional registers in the Nivelles prison archives. Another 14 registers came to light in the Forest prison archives, which had undergone mold treatment. The total number of surviving registers for the whole of Belgium has therefore grown to 623. They originate from 23 different prisons and are physically kept in 12 State Archives' repositories.

Prison name	Number of registers	Period
Liège prison	40	1852-1924
Verviers prison	34	1853-1924
Antwerp prison	74	1857-1924
Leuven central prison	15	1861-1889
Ghent auxiliary prison	53	1865-1924
Namur prison	24	1868-1924
Arlon prison	32	1870-1924
Nivelles prison	22	1871-1924
Hasselt prison	12	1872-1924
Turnhout prison	19	1872-1924
Veurne prison	11	1872-1924
Dendermonde prison	24	1873-1924
Leuven auxiliary prison	27	1873-1924
Mons prison	43	1873-1924
Neufchâteau prison	8	1875-1924
Bruges prison	37	1876-1924
Tournai prison	29	1877-1924
Mechelen prison	8	1881-1924
Ghent central prison	88	1898-1924
Tongeren prison	5	1898-1924
Forest prison	14	1910-1924
Dinant prison	2	1917-1924
Oudenaarde prison	2	1919-1924

Figure 3: The digitised registers of moral bookkeeping

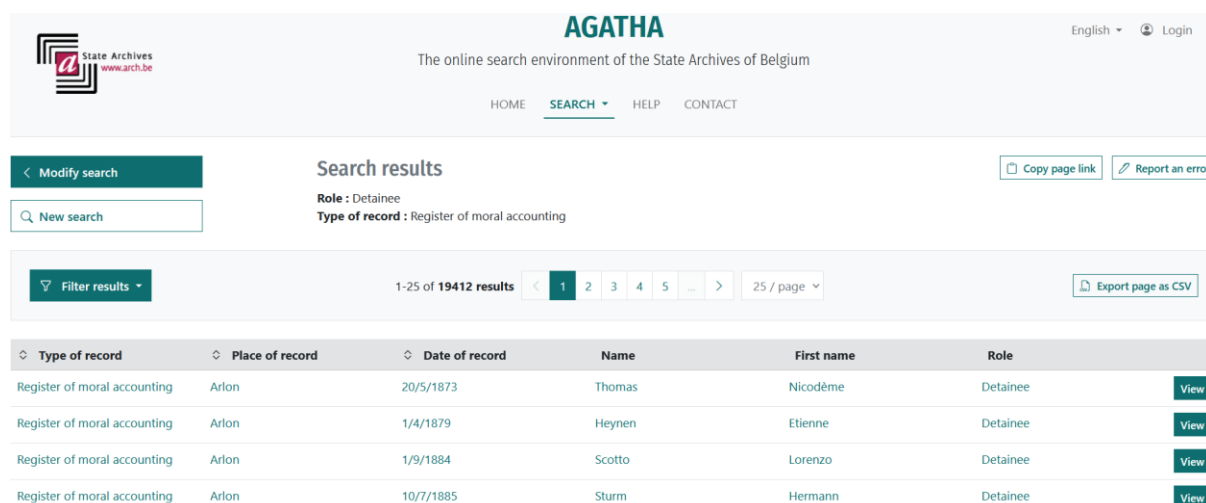
The pages of the moral bookkeeping were scanned to create high definition, 300 dpi TIFF files, from which JPEG2000 files were created for transmission over the internet. The uncompressed TIFF files are preserved for archival purposes in the digital repository of the State Archives. The image (jpeg) files of the documents are directly sourced from their online catalogue available on the Agatha search web site of the State Archives ('Archive inventories': <https://agatha.arch.be/en/search/ead/>). The c. 120,000 scans are made available online and can be freely consulted.

Moral bookkeeping database

With the help of 50 volunteers, all the data was entered into a database. A total of 122,225 male and female convicts were given new names. This database offers an unprecedented overview of the convicted prison population in Belgium during the second half of the nineteenth and the first quarter

of the twentieth century. Genealogists will be able to find out if their ancestors were ever behind bars. The database will also serve as a powerful research tool for social historians and historical criminologists seeking to uncover the functioning of criminal justice in Belgium in that period. These datasets with searchable and combinable variables such as age, gender, location, occupation, religion and type of crime offer opportunities to examine not only who was imprisoned, but also how demographic, social, economic, religious, and geographic factors interacted with criminal prosecution and incarceration in Belgium during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Such analyses contribute to understanding historical inequalities, changing patterns of crime, and the social composition of the Belgian prison system.

All the data has been processed, checked and submitted to DIVA. Some of the datasets have already been integrated into Agatha and are now available online. The data is being uploaded on a prison-by-prison basis. Via the ‘Analyses of Records’ screen, it is possible to search by name, ‘Role: detainee’ and/or ‘Type of record: register of moral accounting’.



The screenshot shows the Agatha search engine interface. At the top, the logo for State Archives Belgium is visible, along with the text 'AGATHA The online search environment of the State Archives of Belgium'. Navigation links include HOME, SEARCH, HELP, and CONTACT. A search bar on the left contains the text 'New search'. The main section displays 'Search results' for the criteria 'Role : Detainee' and 'Type of record : Register of moral accounting'. It shows 1-25 of 19412 results. A table lists the results with columns: Type of record, Place of record, Date of record, Name, First name, and Role. Each row has a 'View' button.

Type of record	Place of record	Date of record	Name	First name	Role
Register of moral accounting	Arlon	20/5/1873	Thomas	Nicodème	Detainee
Register of moral accounting	Arlon	1/4/1879	Heynen	Etienne	Detainee
Register of moral accounting	Arlon	1/9/1884	Scotto	Lorenzo	Detainee
Register of moral accounting	Arlon	10/7/1885	Sturm	Hermann	Detainee

Figure 4: screenshot of the Agatha search engine

The data fields in Agatha are limited. The OUTLAW database contains more data fields than are available in Agatha, which means that most of the data entered into the OUTLAW database cannot be viewed in Agatha, except in the comments field. Agatha is particularly useful for genealogists and anyone searching for a specific person. It is less suitable for broader research.

To still allow researchers and interested parties to explore all the data fields that have been entered, the complete datasets for each prison are made available through SODHA (Social Sciences and Digital Humanities Archive – www.sodha.be). SODHA also automatically publishes the data in the Consortium of European Social Science Data Archives (CESSDA) catalog. This makes the data sets freely available (open access) to all researchers who wish to work with the complete data sets.

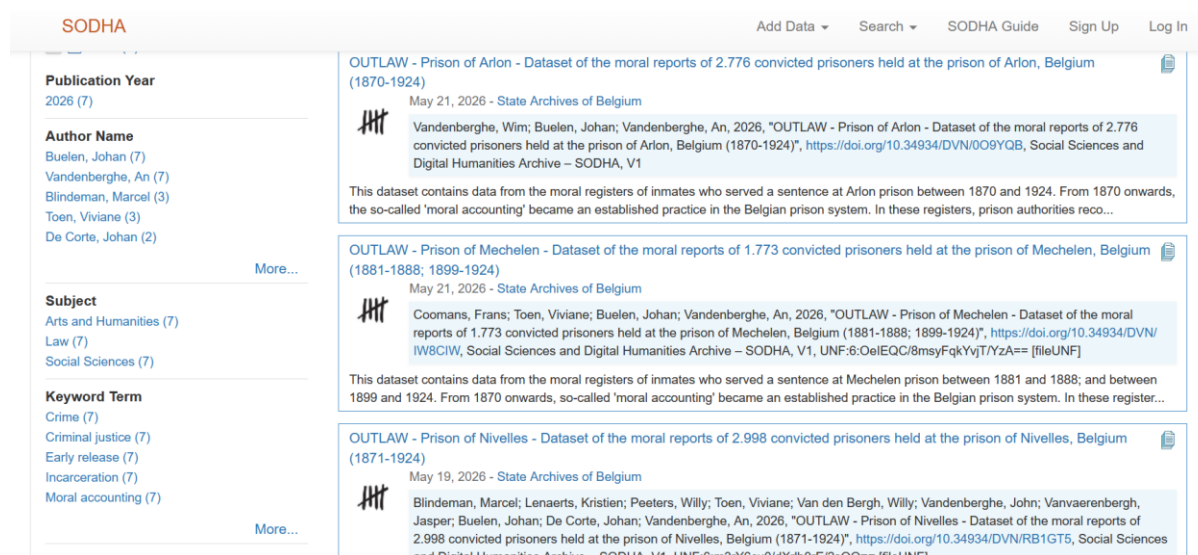


Figure 5: screenshot of the SODHA platform

The direct availability and multiple search options greatly enhances the accessibility of the data in the underlying digitised registers for amateur historians and members of the larger public as well as for academic research.

Researchers and other interested parties who are looking for additional information that is not present in the database can consult the digitised images in a more targeted way. These images contain a lot more data about the convicted person, such as: physical characteristics, possible nicknames, a detailed description of the crime committed, the court that convicted the person, previous convictions, health, behaviour in the institution, moral classification etc.

Online portal for prison archives

An online portal for prison archives that is integrated in the State Archives' website will be launched. In preparation of the launch of this portal, a bilingual project website was created on WordPress: outlawtales.blog.

This website initially served primarily as a resource for the volunteers: it contains the data entry guide and reference lists for volunteers.

Throughout the project, the project website provided updates on the project's progress and featured project news, activities, publications and lectures. It also highlights initiatives by other organisations relating to (the history of) the prison system.

The project website already shows visitors how storytelling techniques can be applied to the data in order to uncover and share the untold stories of 19th-century 'criminals'. The potential of penitentiary sources is illustrated by a selection of telling trajectories of people confronted with the law.

The website refers visitors to the search engines of the State Archives where the digitised prison records are made available to the public and the finding aids of all prison archives can be found. It also refers to the database of the registers of moral bookkeeping, partially available in the Agatha search environment and whose complete datasets are included in SODHA.

In addition to the content already published online, work has also been carried out on texts that will go live when the portal is launched: e.g. prison histories of all Belgian prisons, source descriptions, search strategies, an overview of the archives.

However, the portal is not yet available online. The launch of the portal has been put on hold as it is to form part of the State Archives' website, which is currently undergoing a revamp. The portal for prison archives will be integrated into the new website, which is likely to be launched in autumn 2026 to replace the current www.arch.be.

In the meantime, the project website – featuring stories, activities, guides, and more – will remain available online and will even be updated.

Other achievements

In addition to the objectives set out in the project, there are other noteworthy achievements.

1) In April 2023 the project staff member staged an exhibition titled 'Caged', as part of Heritage Day, with the theme 'Beastly'. The exhibition delved into the harsh, lonely reality of the Belgian prison system well into the 20th century, based on judicial and penitentiary archives. In conjunction with the exhibition, a game for children was also put together, in which they explored the old prison life together with their parents. If they earned enough points, by solving puzzles and performing 'prison labour', they were allowed to leave prison.

2) The project staff member staged a second exhibition about a Dutch serial killer who also claimed several victims in Belgium – specifically in Ghent, barely two hundred metres from the State Archives building. This exhibition, titled 'The case of Hendrik de Jong', ran from November 14, 2023, to February 15, 2024 and attracted a lot of public and media attention. A podcast was dedicated to it, and several national newspapers published articles about it:

- ✓ Podcast De Stemmen van Assisen: Apple (<https://podcasts.apple.com/be/podcast/de-stemmen-van-assisen/id1494016505>) or Spotify (<https://open.spotify.com/episode/5glkkFDdY5BnEyF8utbj7u>).
- ✓ [Ook in ons land liep een 'Jack the ripper' rond: het verhaal van Hendrik de Jong, moordenaar met staalblauwe ogen \(Gent\)](#) | Het Nieuwsblad, November 5, 2023.
- ✓ [Was Jack the Ripper een Nederlander die ook Gentse vrouwen vermoordde?](#) | De Morgen, November 10, 2023.
- ✓ [Hoe ook Gent een Jack the Ripper kende](#) | Het Laatste Nieuws, November 18, 2023.

3) The project team of State Archives Ghent together with Laura Nys (UGent) mapped out a True Crime walking tour in the centre of Ghent, bringing archive material into the public sphere through thirteen stories, based on authentic judicial records kept in the Ghent State Archives. The walking tour was compiled into a publication, which was printed in a limited edition but is also available free of charge in digital form and can be downloaded via the project website. It is also available on the izi-travel app. This initiative proved a success. Two Ghent-based guide organisations have included the walk in their programme, and Visit Gent, the city's tourist board, is also set to promote it, primarily to foreign tourists.

4.2. Results of the PhD project (De Vuyst)

The empirical research carried out within the PhD project confirms the project's central hypothesis: individuals' encounters with the criminal justice system differed fundamentally depending on their social profile and on the social capital they were able to mobilise. Across the successive arenas of the penal chain, people identified as social 'outsiders' were consistently treated differently, and generally, more harshly, than those considered part of the 'established' population. Social vulnerability thus shaped the outcomes of contact with the law at nearly every stage of the judicial process.

One of the clearest markers of social vulnerability to emerge from the research is the absence of a fixed residence. Individuals without a stable address were treated noticeably more harshly by the law than those with an established home address. This difference manifested itself in specific ways at several points in individuals' judicial trajectories. First, itinerant individuals were more likely to be arrested outright, whereas people with a fixed residence were more often able to avoid arrest altogether, for example by presenting themselves 'voluntarily' at the prison gate to serve a prior-imposed sentence rather than being taken into custody. Second, the court and prison archives show that 'outsiders', and those lacking a fixed residence in particular, were significantly less likely to benefit from suspended sentences or conditional release than individuals with stable residence. While the law offered mechanisms of leniency, their application depended heavily on whether a defendant/convict could be vouched for by a stable social position. The research shows that outsiders were structurally excluded from these more lenient outcomes, often independent of the severity of the offence itself.

Beyond residential status, the research has demonstrated that the active mobilisation of social capital had indeed a clear impact on judicial trajectories. For example, defendants, who were able to summon credible, respectable witnesses on their behalf, i.e. individuals whose testimony carried weight and authority in the eyes of the court, had a significant advantage in court than those who could not draw on such support. Defendants and convicts who possessed or could access networks of respectable acquaintances (neighbours, family members, employers willing to testify to their character) were able to convert this social capital into tangible judicial advantages at the various levels of the judicial chain. Conversely, this same dynamic meant that isolation from such networks heightened a defendant's or convict's vulnerability, depriving them of endorsements that could temper judicial outcomes.

A further key finding of this project is that individuals confronted with the criminal justice system were not always simply passive recipients of judicial decisions imposed upon them from above. The court and prison archives show that defendants and convicts often sought to negotiate with authorities at every level of the judicial chain. This finding nuances any purely top-down reading of criminal justice history. Even those with limited social capital exercised meaningful agency and their voices, while filtered through official record-keeping, can be recovered from the archives. For example, during the investigative and prosecution phase, one recurring strategy was to mitigate or minimise guilt. In their statements to the investigating magistrate, suspects frequently sought to downplay their own involvement, reframe their actions in a more favourable light, or shift responsibility onto co-defendants or circumstances beyond their control. Such rhetorical strategies were aimed at shaping the outcome of the judicial process. A similar form of agency is visible at the post-conviction stage, where convicts frequently addressed letters to the prison director, public prosecutor or the Minister of Justice, requesting early release or more lenient treatment. These letters are a genre of sources that give access to convicts' own voices and show individuals actively petitioning the authorities,

invoking good behaviour, family circumstances or expressions of remorse in an effort to negotiate an improvement in their situation. Far from simply enduring their sentence, many convicts treated imprisonment as a condition that could, to some extent, be negotiated from within.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that even individuals occupying highly vulnerable positions within the social hierarchy were not without recourse. By reconstructing these micro-level strategies, the research recovers the voices and agency of marginal populations who often remain invisible in historical research. This bottom-up perspective complements the more structural findings on differential treatment, offering a fuller picture of how defendants and convicts tried to negotiate justice.

4.3. Analysis of the registers of ‘moral bookkeeping’ of the prison of Bruges, 1876-1928 (Bisschop, Debrulle, Nys, De Koster & Vrints)

In addition to the UGent PhD project, and drawing on the moral bookkeeping database compiled by the State Archives at Ghent, the UGent-team set out to focus on in-depth analysis of one specific case, the prison of Bruges and its detainees (listed in the moral bookkeeping) during the period 1876-1928. Enriching the data from the moral bookkeeping database for Bruges with indicators for social class (HISCLASS), geo-referencing of places of birth, residence and transfers from the Bruges prison, the UGent team was able to examine the profiles and trajectories of Bruges prisoners during this period more closely. The central research question posed was: “What factors played a decisive role in the process by which these prisoners were turned into ‘outlaws’?”. A publication is currently being prepared based on the first results.

5. DISSEMINATION AND VALORISATION

5.1. Lectures/Presentations

2022

De Koster Margo, Keynote lecture, 'Reconstructing the Everyday/night Interactions between Street Level Bureaucrats and Marginal Groups in Urban Space', International Conference "Between Deviance and Marginalization: Gendered Perspectives on Transnational Crime", Erfurt, 27.10.2022.

De Koster Margo, *Policer le port d'Anvers, fin XIXe-début XXe siècle : un paysage complexe et varié d'institutions et de pratiques policières*. Journée d'études 'Illégalismes, polices et économies populaires dans les ports industriels (1860-1960) – Projet ILLEPORT', 3.10.2022.

De Koster Margo, *Setting an agenda for the development of historical approaches to criminology: A review of recent theoretical-methodological work on doing historical criminology*, Eurocrim 2022, annual conference of the European Society of Criminology, Malaga, 20.09.2022.

De Koster Margo, *The policing of vagrants in late-nineteenth-century Brussels and Antwerp*, Workshop 'Making The Vagrant, Controlling Labour Mobility', BCDSS, Bonn, 7.06.2022.

De Vuyst Matteo, *Outsiders and the law. Uncovering criminal justice trajectories in nineteenth-century Belgium*, seminarie 'My project in a nutshell' Posthumus Institute, Brussel, 1.12.2022.

Drossens, P., *Was opa een nazi? Speuren naar het oorlogsverleden*. Familiekunde Vlaanderen, Leuven, 22.02.2022.

Drossens, P., *De gevangenis van Oudenaarde (1829-1950). Het sluitstuk van Ducpétiaux' cellulaire droom*. Geschied- en Oudheidkundige Kring Oudenaarde. Oudenaarde, 29.09.2022.

Drossens P. & Vandenberghe A., *De gevangenis van Dendermonde en 'Het project OUTLAW'*. Erfgoedcel Dijk92. Dendermonde, 15.12.2022.

2023

De Koster Margo, *Conclusions et Perspectives*, Atelier de recherche 'Regards croisés pour une histoire de la matérialité policière (Québec-Belgique)', 13.01.2023.

De Koster Margo, *Removing local nuisances, arresting masterless strangers, and granting 'nights on request'. The policing of vagrancy in late-nineteenth-century Antwerp and Brussels*, European Social Science History Conference 2023, Göteborg, 12.04.2023.

De Vuyst Matteo, *Minor Paper: Uncovering criminal justice trajectories in nineteenth-century Belgium*, seminarie 'Work in Progress' Posthumus Institute, Wageningen, 23.04.2023.

De Vuyst Matteo. *Iedereen gelijk voor de wet? Strafrechtelijke trajecten in negentiende-eeuws-België*. Workshop voor en door migranten?, Gent, AMSAB-ISG, 22.05.2023.

De Vuyst Matteo. *Negotiating justice and (in)equality. Criminal justice trajectories in nineteenth-century Belgium, 1870-1910*. Masterclass A place in the city. Migrant police, policy & housing in the 19th and 20th centuries, Universiteit Antwerpen, 10.05.2023.

De Vuyst Matteo. *Negotiating justice and (in)equality. Criminal justice trajectories in nineteenth-century Belgium, 1870-1910*. Seminarie Research Design Course, Posthumus Institute en ESTER, Wenen, 27.09.2023.

Drossens Paul, *De geschiedenis van het gevangeniswezen en de herbestemming van gevangenissen*. Verleden Week (Vakgroep Geschiedenis) UGent, Gent, 27.03.2023.

Drossens Paul & Vandenberghe An, *Project Outlaw. Hoe 125.000 gedetineerden terug een naam krijgen*. Wetenschappelijke Lente Rijksarchief, Brussel, 5.06.2023.

Drossens Paul. *Discussie CJCS en Sidis-Griffie*, Studiedag Recidive en criminele carrière: het digitale erfgoed van het strafrecht ten dienste van justitie actoren – presentatie van het Brain 2.0-project It is Happening again, NICC, Brussel, 14.11.2023.

Karsdorp Folgert, De Koster Margo & Kestemont Mike, *Dark Numbers: Modeling the historical vulnerability to arrest in Brussels (1879-1880) using demographic predictors*. Digital Humanities Benelux Conference, Brussels, 1.06.2023.

Vandenberghe An, *Project OUTLAW*, erfgoednamiddag Erfgoedcel Noorderkempen en Gevangenis museum Merksplas, Wortel, 6.04.2023.

Vandenberghe An. *Outlaw. Stories of inclusion, exclusion and mobility of 125.000 convicts*. Annual Conference N.W. Posthumus Institute, Research School for Economic and Social History in the Netherlands and Flanders, Antwerpen, 24.05.2023.

2024

De Koster Margo. *Table ronde: Quelle place pour l'histoire des polices dans la formation des policiers?*. Journée d'études 'Polices d'hier et d'aujourd'hui : plongée dans le passé pour mieux façonner l'avenir. Bilan et perspectives du projet NaPol-Intel', Brussels, State Archives, 24.01.2024.

De Vuyst Matteo. *De weg naar gerechtigheid? Strafrechtelijke trajecten in negentiende-eeuws België, 1870-1910*. Lunchlezing project OUTLAW, Gent, 28.02.2024.

De Vuyst, Matteo. *In het spoor van de dader. Strafrechtelijke trajecten in negentiende-eeuws België, 1870-1910*. Dag van de nieuwste geschiedenis. Brussel, 13.05.2024.

De Vuyst, Matteo. *Project OUTLAW. In het spoor van de dader, 1850-1924*. Publieksdag 'Oorlogsboeven', Brabants Historisch Informatiecentrum (BHIC), Den Bosch, 24.05.2024.

De Vuyst, Matteo. *Navigating the judicial chain. Foreign migrants' criminal justice trajectories in nineteenth-century Bruges, 1870-1910*. Conferentie Tolerant Migrant Cities, 1600-1900, International Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (IISG), Amsterdam, 22.11.2024.

Drossens Paul, *Het Belgisch gevangeniswezen. Vroeger en nu*. Guest lecture Master Criminology UGent, Gent, 28.03.2024.

Drossens, Paul. *Misdaad en straf in de hedendaagse tijd (1795 - heden) Een overzicht van de gerechtelijke en penitentiaire actoren, bronnen en onderzoeksmogelijkheden*. Nationaal congres van Familiekunde Vlaanderen, Dilbeek, 13.04.2024.

Drossens Paul & Wils Kaat. *De archieven van Justitie: mogelijkheden voor onderzoek en publiekswerking*. Dag van de nieuwste geschiedenis. Brussel, 13.05.2024.

Drossens, Paul. *De moeizame weg naar toegankelijke archieven van het militair gerecht in België*. Vlaams-Zeeuws Archivarissenoverleg. Brugge, 1.10.2024.

Drossens, Paul. *De moeizame weg naar toegankelijke archieven van het militair gerecht in België*. Vrijwilligersevent OUTLAW, Gent, 14.11.2024.

Karsdorp Folgert, Kestemont Mike & De Koster Margo, 'Beyond the Register: Demographic Modeling of Arrest Patterns in 1879-1880 Brussels', CHR 2024: Computational Humanities Research Conference. Aarhus, Denmark, 4-6.12.2024.

Nys Laura. *Love, grief and resistance. Young women and emotions in Belgian reform schools, 1900-1960*, Queen Mary University London, Centre for the History of the Emotions, 29.05.2024.

Nys Laura. "Getting Access to the Soul of the Children." *Observing Children's Emotions in Belgian Reform Schools, 1900-1950s*. 43rd Conference of the European Society for the History of the Human Sciences (ESHHS), University of Essex, 25.06.2024.

Nys, Laura. *Gabriel's Heart. Youth and emotions in Belgian State Reform Schools, 1890-1965*, Congress of the Independent Social Research Foundation (ISRF), London, 8.11.2024.

Vandenberghe An. *Project OUTLAW. Hoe 125.000 gevangenen terug een naam krijgen (1850-1924)*. Nationaal congres van Familiekunde Vlaanderen, Dilbeek, 13.04.2024.

Vandenberghe, An. *Project OUTLAW. Hoe een databank 120.000 boeven' vangt (1850-1924)*. Dag van de nieuwste geschiedenis. Brussel, 13.05.2024.

Vandenberghe, An. *Aan de slag met gevangenis- en rechtbankarchieven (19de-20ste eeuw)*, webinar Histories vzw, 9.10.2024.

Vandenberghe, An. *Voorstelling van project OUTLAW. Hoe een databank 120.000 'boeven' vangt (1850-1924)*. Familiekunde Vlaanderen, Deinze, 5.11.2024.

Van der Heijden Manon & De Koster Margo: organisation panel 'Migrant Cities and Urban courts in a Global World, 1600–1900', European Association of Urban History Conference 2024 'Cities at Boundaries'. Ostrava, 4-7.09.2024.

2025

De Vuyst, Matteo. *Negotiating justice. Criminal justice trajectories in late-nineteenth-century Bruges, 1870-1910*. European Social Science History Conference, 28.03.2025.

De Vuyst, Matteo. *Navigating the judicial chain Foreign migrants' criminal justice trajectories in nineteenth-century Belgium, 1870-1910*. Empires, Colonialism and the History of International Law Conference. 15.10.2025.

Drossens Paul, *Het Belgisch gevangeniswezen. Vroeger en nu*. Guest lecture Master Criminology UGent, Gent, 13.03.2025.

The OUTLAW project organised a concluding conference at the State Archives in Ghent on May 22, 2026. A diverse audience of 80 guests (historians, criminologists, genealogists, heritage experts, students and volunteers) listened to the following presentations:

Voorstelling projectresultaten

- An Vandenberghe en Paul Drossens, Rijksarchief Gent
- Matteo De Vuyst, Prof. dr. Margo De Koster en Prof. dr. Antoon Vrints, UGent

Aan de slag met OUTLAW

- Project gevangenispoort Den Haag | Prof. dr. Manon van der Heijden, Universiteit Leiden
- DNA-onderzoek | Prof. dr. Maarten Larmuseau, KU Leuven
- Gezondheid | Prof. dr. Isabelle Devos, UGent
- Familiegeschiedenis | Tony Vanhee, Familiekunde Deinze
- Storytelling en true crime wandeling | Dr. Laura Nys, UGent

5.3. Workshops and other educational activities

At the State Archives, the OUTLAW team organized several activities.

Members of the project team hosted three workshops with lectures and practical exercises for an enthusiastic audience of volunteers, genealogists and heritage professionals. They also organized various guided tours in the State Archives building with tutorials about specific archival documents from Belgian prisons, courts and tribunals.

An Vandenberghe gave an online course (a webinar) on how to use judicial and prison archives for genealogical and historical research. This event was organized by Histories vzw.

Paul Drossens gave four guest lectures on the history of Belgian prisons to history students at Ghent University and to first-year bachelor's and master's students in criminology at Ghent University.

He also organized nine workshops with judicial archives from the interwar period for high school students. The workshops allowed young adults to experience what historical-critical reasoning means in practice. They were given access to the actual evidence and court files (police reports, crime scene photographs, sketches, and sometimes even the fatal bullet) and had to work as a group to draw conclusions and reach a verdict. In this way, they practiced skills that are indispensable today: teamwork, reasoning, empathy, historical awareness, knowledge of the criminal justice system and critical thinking.

5.4. Online valorisation and media

The OUTLAW project has its own permanent page on the website of the Belgian State Archives, in Dutch as well as French. It provides all interested parties with basic information about the content of the project, collaborators, contact addresses and news releases.

More extensive information can be found on the bilingual project website: outlawtales.blog.

OUTLAW also has an Instagram account: <https://www.instagram.com/outlawtales/>.

Three project newsletters were sent out to volunteers, members of the steering committee and followers: one in August 2024, one in February 2025 and one in December 2025.

Interesting stories, project updates and news were also communicated to a wider audience through the official channels of the State Archives, namely the Facebook pages (both Dutch and French) and the general newsletters, monthly sent to subscribers.

Websites

<https://outlawtales.blog/>: project website

<https://www.arch.be/index.php?l=nl&m=lopend-onderzoek&r=onderzoeksprojecten&pr=outlaw-outsiders-and-the-law.-uncovering-criminal-justice-trajectories-in-nineteenth-century-belgium-1855-1924> and <https://www.arch.be/index.php?l=fr&m=nos-projets&r=projets-de-recherche&pr=outlaw-outsiders-and-the-law.-uncovering-criminal-justice-trajectories-in-nineteenth-century-belgium-1855-1924>: permanent page on website Belgian State Archives (Dutch and French)

Social media

<https://www.instagram.com/outlawtales/>

<https://www.facebook.com/rijksarchief/> (Dutch) and <https://www.facebook.com/archives.etat/> (French)

6. PUBLICATIONS

2022

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And, of course, the team would not be complete without our volunteers, who processed the data from tens of thousands of records to give more than 120,000 prisoners back their names and a place in history.

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