

# From one textile centre to another

Migrations from the district of Ghent to the city of Armentières (France) during the second half of the 19th century

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## INTRODUCTION

This article studies the underlying mechanisms of nineteenth century migration and more specifically migration between the district of Ghent and the city of Armentières (northern France) during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Both Ghent and Armentières were important centres of the textile industry, about 70 kilometres apart.

Ghent's position as an industrial town was unique: its cotton industry was the only modern mechanized industry in nineteenth century Flanders. Consequently, migrations from Ghent followed quite distinct patterns. F. Lentacker (1973, 226) wrote: "*(Gand) fut le berceau d'émigrations importantes vers la France, mais celles-ci présentèrent des caractères assez différents de ceux [...] des villages du plat-pays et des petites villes*". Workers from Ghent were used to mechanisation and thus more flexible than, for instance, workers from Kortrijk. This explains the close relationship between Ghent and the textile centre Lille-Roubaix-Tourcoing in France. Ties between Ghent and the textile industry in Northern France were moreover enhanced by the owners of the Ghent-cotton mills themselves. In 1815 F. Voortman and F. De Vos started a cotton printing mill in Wazemmes, close to Lille and they also opened a sales outlet in Paris. Because they were not able to find enough skilled labour in France, they tried to persuade workers from Ghent to migrate by offering them higher wages (Scholliers, 1996, 61). Many other industrialists followed this example during the difficult years after the annexation of Belgium by the Netherlands in 1815. The workers experienced this crisis through pay cuts. Between 1810 and 1820 many of them decided to move to the North of France. The extent of these

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed description of my research, see K. Dillen, *Migranten en migratiebewegingen in het arrondissement Gent tijdens de tweede helft van de 19<sup>de</sup> eeuw. Casus: De emigratie naar de Noord-Franse textielstad Armentières*, unpublished MA dissertation, History Department, Ghent University, 2000 (under the supervision of Prof. Dr. E. Vanhaute).

migrations appears to have been such that local authorities were alarmed. So were the inhabitants of Roubaix: xenophobic actions in 1819 made many migrants decide to move back (Lentacker, 1973, 227-228). During the 1820s the cotton industry in Ghent revived and migration to France dropped. In 1829, however, new pay cuts caused migration again, which became even more pronounced in 1831-1832, after the independence of Belgium. The fact that French workers were hired during a strike at the Voortman cotton mill in 1829 demonstrates once more that there were strong and early ties between both regions (Scholliers, 1996, 161). During the crisis of the 1840s which seriously hit rural Flanders, migration soared once again. Ghent had to deal with a large influx of rural migrants which in turn caused serious migration away from Ghent: *“les années noires firent connaître à Gand... l’afflux de campagnards indigents et le départ de journaliers et de tisserands en quête d’emploi jusqu’en France”* (Lentacker, 1973, 227). Emigration from Ghent to Armentières and other French textile towns continued after the crisis. In 1842 both textile centres were linked by rail which reduced the travelling time to just two hours (Scholliers, 1996, 107). During the 1850s the mill owners from Ghent demanded more productivity while simultaneously cutting down the wages. The workers protested but their employers blamed competition from England. All this caused a huge social crisis and once again massive emigration. In the meantime, the textile industry in the North of France was booming. In 1857 the city of Roubaix charted the labour market and concluded that there was a significant shortage of labour (Lentacker, 1973, 243). One mill owner replied: *“de ne pas être en peine d’avoir les tisserands qui lui étaient nécessaires car il les demandait à Gand, au fur et à mesure des besoins”*.

Between 1861 and 1865 the entire textile industry in Ghent was brought to a standstill by ‘the cotton-crisis’. Emigration to northern France was even stimulated by local authorities which negotiated with the French mill owners and took care of the migrants’ (and their family) travelling and removal expenses. Financing these migrations turned out to be much cheaper than poor relief. In three years time, between 1862 and 1864, about 2,000 inhabitants of Ghent left for France. Much to the relief of the local bourgeoisie, because they were afraid of riots (Lentacker, 1973, 228). The French textile industry was not hit as hard because it was not exclusively cotton oriented; the cotton-crisis was more than compensated by the booming linen and wool industry. The end of the cotton crisis resulted in a blow for the textile industry in the North of France. But in 1868, 1869, 1871 and 1873 new social conflicts in Ghent started new emigrations to France. According to F. Lentacker: *“Les Belges trouvaient en France, bien mieux qu’en Belgique, la certitude de l’emploi. Ils y connaissaient aussi une existence moins casanière, des rapports sociaux plus ouverts et des mentalités progressistes. La condition ouvrière en France n’a jamais eu, autant qu’en Belgique ce caractère servile et humiliant que les catégories sociales possédantes lui attribuaient”* (Lentacker, 1973, 267). After the first Belgian labour legislation in

1886 differences between both countries became smaller, especially for wages.

By the end of the nineteenth century, emigration to France lost its momentum. Some authors have suggested that, because naturalisation became easier after the new laws of 1889 and 1893, many Belgian emigrants became 'invisible'. J. Dupâquier, however, noticed that few Belgian immigrants, about 8,000 men before 1900, were naturalised. Between 1891 and 1901 the Belgian population in France had decreased by more than 70,000 (Dûpaquier, 1991, 332, 337).<sup>2</sup> Permanent migration appears to have been replaced with commuting: Belgian border towns grew substantially during this period (Lentacker, 1973, 267). August de Winne estimated that about half of the 3,000 workers residing in Mouscron worked in France. The introduction of season tickets in 1869 promoted commuting (Quairiaux, 1984, 184). In 1870 14,223 train tickets were sold to workers, in 1890 more than a million and in 1900 four and a half million. At the end of the century the textile industry in the North of France went from one crisis to the other. Recession struck many times and periods of boom were short lived. Protectionist measures could no longer sustain the textile industry. The Roubaix wool industry was on the verge of collapse as a result of high prices for raw materials and competition from abroad. Northern France and Ghent started focusing on other industries and loosened their ties. The attraction of earlier migrants became gradually less important.

In short, it appears that the origins of most migrations can be traced back to macro-economic factors such as general economic conditions, employment and average wage. But no matter how important these economic factors were, they do not fully explain why people migrated. Migration resulted, after all, from individual decisions. A family could, besides economic progression, also pursue a better social and cultural environment. New challenges could have been motives for migration as well (Paping, 1999, 18-19). Some authors have pointed out that economic circumstances as such a priori cannot explain migration, since potential migrants never had this broad perspective (Dumont, 1995, 81; Moch, 1997, 44; Strikwerda and Guerin-Gonzales, 1993, 10). In order to understand migration fully it is not enough to study how migratory movements arise and peter out. The crucial element is to understand why some people took part in these migrations and others did not. Hence, existing macro-research has to be complemented with micro research.<sup>3</sup>

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2. The size of the Belgian population in France dropped between 1891 and 1900 from 240,399 to 168,539.

3. Micro-research is very labour-intensive and therefore mostly small-scale. Recently, however, some large-scaled projects on nineteenth century public records were set up in the Netherlands and France, and have made large-scale micro research possible. See, for instance, the work of J. Kok and P.-A. Rosental.

## 1. SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

My research consists of two parts. The first part is a macro study of immigration and emigration in different types of communes within the district of Ghent. These results are complemented by a micro study of 280 families who left the district of Ghent for Armentières. I will try to reveal the underlying mechanisms of nineteenth century migration by reconstructing both the migrants' itineraries and their family ties.

The macro research is based on civil registration.<sup>4</sup> The absolute figures of the migration registers are, as J. Stengers pointed out, not really reliable, but a comparison of the average numbers over a longer period is (Stengers, 1978, 10-14). The purpose is to investigate to what extent migrations were determined by the nature of the villages they originated from. Ghent and three categories of communes were studied: rural communes, industrialised communes and communes with a strong proto-industrial character.<sup>5</sup> These villages experienced nineteenth century industrialisation and economic crisis quite differently.

The micro research is based on a fairly unique source i.e. a collection of family filing cards made by the city of Armentières during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Only a few other towns, like Strasbourg, dispose of comparable large collections for the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> The records give the same information as the Belgian population registers, but they are in comparison easy to use.<sup>8</sup> The local administration of Armentières made filing cards per family. For every member of the family the card holds the name and surname, the place and date of birth, marriage and death, the names of the parents

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<sup>4</sup> National Institut for Statistics, Population and vital statistics, District of Ghent, 1857-1900.

<sup>5</sup> These categories were based on DE BELDER (J.), VANHAUTE (E.) and VRIELINCK (S.), "Naar een kwantitatieve databank van de Belgische gemeenten, 19de en 20ste eeuw. Verslag van een proefproject", *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis*, 23, 1992, 3-4, pp. 355-414. Rural communes were selected on the basis of the proportion of farms larger than two hectares to the number of households in 1846. For industrial communes I used the criterion of industrial employment in 1910 and proto-industrial communes were identified by the employment in the flax industry in 1846. For rural centres the minimum was 32 per cent, for industrial centres 25 per cent and for proto-industrial centres 50 per cent. I retained about 10 communes in each category.

<sup>6</sup> Armentières City Archives, 1.755.331: Fiches de changement de domicile.

<sup>7</sup> I thank Prof. Dr. D. Terrier (University of Valenciennes) who brought this source to my attention.

<sup>8</sup> Belgian population registers are classified by street, so it is more difficult to follow separate families through time.

and grandparents, the consecutive addresses in Armentières and sometimes additional information. For the head of the family there is also information about his or her profession, the date of arrival in and departure from Armentières as well as the place of origin and destination. The filing cards were kept up to date, even when families left and returned to Armentières. The source is thus extremely interesting because it presents a continuous profile of each family. The cards permit to follow families and their migrations during a long period and a close study of family ties since they also mention the names of the parents of these migrants. The reconstruction of these travel itineraries and family ties yields some interesting insights.

A deficiency of the filing system is, however, that it started in a fairly random manner. The city did not oblige its habitants to register their filing cards and no bill was passed. From the 1850s onwards the system improved gradually, but only since the 1870s real efforts were made by the local council to register as many families as possible. Filing cards were made for every family dealing with the local administration. In practice, this meant in case of birth, marriage, death and obviously migration. The registration of changes of address became customary. Indeed, after 1870 some filing cards stated "*n'a pas produit de changement de domicile*". Of course, there are no files of people who never contacted the local authorities.<sup>9</sup>

My research is limited to families whose names begin with the letters d, e, k, l, m and v, nearly 50 per cent of all families.<sup>10</sup> The filing cards were selected according to the following criteria: the date of arrival in Armentières had to be between 1850 and 1900 and at least one family member had to have lived in the district of Ghent. 247 filing cards met these requirements. I then added, following the same criteria, another 33 records which gave a total of 280 filing cards.<sup>11</sup> This study is thus based on the data of 280 families who left the district of Ghent for Armentières during the second half of the nineteenth century. So the families I studied settled more or less permanently in Armentières. 'La population ouvrière flottante' who crossed the border from nearby villages during periods of recession remains invisible.

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<sup>9</sup> Since my research does not cover the intensity of migration from Ghent to Armentières, there was no need to investigate this further. Yet, it is important to know the nature of this hiatus. The records do not include files from unmarried immigrants who left Armentières still single. A sample survey of 1,535 files by C. Thiery (1999) revealed that this concerned only 2 per cent of all unmarried immigrants. It seems that the most mobile group remained out of the grasp of local authorities, and thus of historians.

<sup>10</sup> 16,061 of 33,552 files were examined.

<sup>11</sup> These 33 records are part of an analysis of nuclear families, which is not discussed in this article. For further details, see Dillen, 2000.

## 2. MIGRATION IN THE DISTRICT OF GHENT

Demographic evolution depends on natural growth and migration. Population figures present therefore an initial impression of the direction of the migration movements (see table 1). The nineteenth century was characterised by three phases. The first third of the nineteenth century was determined by rapid urbanisation. During the second phase industrialised suburbs grew exponentially and during the last quarter rural communes started growing as well, while from 1890s onwards the population of Ghent started to decline. As the degree of industrialisation reached its saturation point towards the end of the century, exponential growth of industrialised communes diminished too. As expected, demographic evolution was determined by economic circumstances. Yet it is important to take a closer look at these results.

My main goal is to investigate if migration was an escape. Indeed, cities grew during crisis periods while the population of rural communes decreased. Ghent never grew more rapidly than during recessions. In the period 1831-1846 (linen crisis and famine) and 1880-1890 (great depression) the population grew respectively by 1.4 per cent and 1.3 per cent per year. Table 1 shows that

TABLE 1 POPULATION GROWTH (%)									
	<i>1829-1910</i>		<i>1846-1856</i>		<i>1875-1890</i>		<i>1880-1890</i>		
	<i>Total Yearly</i>		<i>Total Yearly</i>		<i>Total Yearly</i>		<i>Total Yearly</i>		
Ghent	98.7	1.2	5.8	0.6	16.5	1.1	26.6	0.9	
Rural communes	9.2	0.1	-6.5	-0.7	2.6	0.2	10.7	0.4	
Industrial communes	123.5	1.5	-3.9	-0.4	23.8	1.6	45.9	1.5	
Proto-industrial communes	22.2	0.3	-9.8	-1.0	3.1	0.2	22	0.7	

proto-industrial communes, dependent on the linen industry, lost many of their inhabitants around the middle of the century. The recession of the last quarter of the century is, however, more complex to grasp. From 1880 onwards, industrialisation spread to neighbouring communes and made rural population grow exponentially.

A second point is that the size of the rural population hardly increased during the nineteenth century, while industrialised towns became twice as large (see table 1). This is not surprising. With industrialisation, population living nearby factories rose. Flemish villages had been suffering from overpopulation for sometime anyway. The only way to survive in rural Flanders was by cultivating very intensively a plot of land combined with a well-organised cottage

industry. Thus, the flight away from the countryside appears to make perfect sense. French authors generally refer to the 'exode rural', the English to the 'up-rooting of rural communes'. Both have a negative undertone and can be associated with to the myth of a peaceful, sedentary, rural pre-industrial society. And, indeed, it was a myth. Since the early 1990s authors agree that pre-industrial societies were equally mobile (Rosental, 1999, 27-41). Population figures, suggesting emigration-flows from rural communes to industrialised communes, are quite misleading as my research shows (see table 2). Industrialisation did not cause a particular flight away from rural communes at all. The slow growth of rural communes was not due to growing emigration, but to extremely small immigration. In other words, industrialisation did not start a flight from the countryside, but it only directed existing migration flows towards industrialised towns. Rural communes lost all appeal.

TABLE 2    MIGRATION BETWEEN 1857 AND 1900

	<i>Immigration (‰ per year)</i>		<i>Emigration (‰ per year)</i>	
	<i>Average</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Median</i>
Ghent	41.0	42.2	34.1	35.6
Rural communes	35.5	36.0	42.1	40.0
Industrial communes	67.1	65.9	63.2	62.6
Proto-industrial communes	42.6	41.2	45.9	43.9

My results suggest that migration was not in the first place an escape, but a relatively natural phenomenon. Except for migration flows to the cities during nineteenth century crisis periods. In these cases, there was undoubtedly subsistence migration. However, in most cases migration was a positive choice. My research shows that subsistence migration was rather exceptional. In the following section I will take a closer look at 280 families who migrated from the district of Ghent to Armentières in order to investigate why they decided to move.

### 3. THE ITINERARIES OF MIGRANTS

The first part of my micro research aims to find out whether these migrations match theoretical migration models. Most of these models originated in the late nineteenth century and were based on the idea that migrants moved from smaller to larger towns in different stages (Grigg, 1985, 42). Migrations started in rural areas and had industrial towns as their final destination. This step-

wise migration was seen as a spatial derivative of the social and cultural transition families underwent during their moves. Recent findings, however, do not confirm these models (Baines, 1985, 39; Kok, 1999, 103; Oris, 1993, 217; Pinol, 1991, 151) They emphasize the importance of inter-urban and inter-rural migration. As D.Baines states, *"we do not know enough about the way that migrants reached the cities. In turn this means that it is not proven that rural-urban moves predominated"*. Indeed, my macro research on the district of Ghent showed that the low population growth in rural areas was not the result of high emigration, but of very low immigration.

I traced the itineraries of the families between the district of Ghent and Armentières. The families visited a total of 211 communes. These were categorised according to population size, degree of industrialisation, importance of the textile industry and distance to Armentières.<sup>12</sup> To measure the degree of industrialisation and the importance of the textile industry I calculated the percentage of the active population in the local industry and the textile industry. Nevertheless, Belgian and French censuses use different criteria. Whereas the French include the total population, Belgian censuses only take the active population into account. The differences are significant. For instance, no Belgian town had an active population in industry over 40 per cent while in France almost one third reached this percentage. Fortunately, only 145 of 931 migrations had a Belgian commune as destination, half of them went to Ghent. Corrections were made by classifying towns (more than 20,000 habitants) as a separate category. Hence, only 69 communes or 7.4 per cent of all migrations had a different profile. I converted the itineraries of the families into grids. As the period between the place of birth and the first destination could not always be determined, separate grids were made for the total number of moves and for the total number minus the first move. The 280 families moved 931 times and in 401 cases Armentières was the destination. I was not able to trace the families after they left the city definitively. This does, however, not distort my research results since my main concern is the chronological sequence of the different types of destinations.

Table 3 shows the itineraries according to population size. There is no sign of step-wise migration. Migrants left either for or from a town: most of them moved straight to town and more than 40 per cent of all migrations took place

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<sup>12</sup> For the French communes: Departemental Archives of the North, M473/33-37, Model nr. 10: Population census 1886, Districts of Cambrai, Dunkerque and Lille. Departemental Archives of Pas-de-Calais, M4250-4254, Model nr. 11: Population according to profession 1891, Districts of Arras, Béthune, Boulogne and St. Omer. For the Belgian communes: National Institute for Statistics, Population census 1910 and Census of Industry and Trade 1910.

between towns. The 'invisible' period between birth and the first known destination does not seem to have affected the results too much since both grids show similar results.

TABLE 3 ITINERARIES ACCORDING TO POPULATION SIZE

<i>Total</i>	<i>From</i> <i>&lt; 2,000</i>	<i>2,000- 5,000</i>	<i>5,000- 10,000</i>	<i>10,000- 20,000</i>	<i>&gt;20,000 (Town)</i>	<i>Unknown</i>
To < 2,000		2	2	2	11	
2,000-5,000	2	6	11	3	58	2
5,000-10,000	3	13	17	4	105	1
10,000- 20,000		7	17	4	19	2
>20,000 (Town)	24	78	114	25	389	13
Unknown		1	2	1	11	
<i>Total minus the first move</i>	<i>From</i> <i>&lt; 2,000</i>	<i>2,000- 5,000</i>	<i>5,000- 10,000</i>	<i>10,000- 20,000</i>	<i>&gt;20,000 (Town)</i>	<i>Unknown</i>
To < 2,000			1	2	9	
2,000-5,000	1	1	6	3	49	2
5,000-10,000	2	8	10	3	91	1
10,000- 20,000		1	2	1	8	1
>20,000 (Town)	9	58	90	17	256	11
Unknown		0	1	1	6	

TABLE 4 ITINERARIES ACCORDING TO DEGREE OF INDUSTRIALISATION

<i>Total</i>	<i>From &lt; 20%</i>	<i>20-40%</i>	<i>40-60%</i>	<i>60-80%</i>	<i>Town</i>	<i>Unknown</i>
To < 20%	2	1			7	
20-40%	5	10	4	4	48	1
40-60%	8	11	4	2	56	5
60-80%	4	9	4	1	80	
Town	29	85	59	66	389	15
Unknown	2	2	4		13	1
<i>Total minus the first move</i>	<i>From &lt; 20%</i>	<i>20-40%</i>	<i>40-60%</i>	<i>60-80%</i>	<i>Town</i>	<i>Unknown</i>
To < 20%	1				7	
20-40%		3	4	4	31	
40-60%		6	4	2	47	5
60-80%		6	4	1	70	
Town	4	44	59	65	256	13
Unknown	1	1	4		8	1

Table 4 presents the itineraries according to the degree of industrialisation. Again, most migrants left straight for town. Hardly anyone migrated to the countryside, even though 44 migrants were born in small villages. The migrants who left for a rural area all originated from a town. Traditionally, this is believed to be the return of older people. However, only in one case a 64-year-old was involved, the other six cases were young families. More than half of all migrations took place between highly industrialised communes.

<i>Total</i>	<i>From &lt; 5%</i>	<i>5-20%</i>	<i>20-40%</i>	<i>&gt; 40%</i>	<i>Town</i>	<i>Unknown</i>
To < 5%		1			8	
5-20%	5	16	1	2	32	1
20-40%	2	6	1	2	20	1
> 40%	5	13	2	14	132	4
Town	29	70	21	119	389	15
Unknown	1	2	1	3	12	1
<i>Total minus the first move</i>	<i>From &lt; 5%</i>	<i>5-20%</i>	<i>20-40%</i>	<i>&gt; 40%</i>	<i>Town</i>	<i>Unknown</i>
To < 5%					8	
5-20%		8	1	1	17	
20-40%		2	1	2	16	1
> 40%	1	6	2	12	115	4
Town	4	33	20	115	256	13
Unknown		2	1	2	7	1

Table 5 shows the itineraries according to importance of the textile industry. The concentration of migrations between towns of the fourth and fifth category is distinct: 70 per cent for the total number of migrations and 75 per cent for the total number minus one. The destination of migrations seems to be determined by the presence of an established textile industry, even though not all migrants were active in this industry.<sup>13</sup> Considering the fact that only 22.8 per cent of all communes belonged to these two categories, the result is even more impressive.

<sup>13</sup>. 66.3 per cent of male immigrants were employed in the textile industry; for 10.9 per cent the profession was unknown.

<i>Total</i>	<i>From 0 km.</i>	<i>&lt; 10 km.</i>	<i>10-20 km.</i>	<i>20-30 km.</i>	<i>30-40 km.</i>	<i>40-50 km.</i>	<i>&gt; 50 km.</i>
To 0 km		123	95		7	5	170
< 10 km	110	14	25		1	1	41
10-20 km.	78	9	27		1	2	89
20-30 km.	4						
30-40 km.	5		1				7
40-50 km.	3	1	2				1
> 50 km.	45	3	5		3	1	52
<i>Total</i>	<i>From 0 km.</i>	<i>&lt; 10 km.</i>	<i>10-20 km.</i>	<i>20-30 km.</i>	<i>30-40 km.</i>	<i>40-50 km.</i>	<i>&gt; 50 km.</i>
To 0 km.		123	95		7	5	49
< 10 km.	110	14	25		1	1	55
10-20 km.	78	9	27		1		17
20-30 km.	4						
30-40 km.	5		1				3
40-50 km.	3	1	2				
> 50 km.	45	3	5		1		11

Although my study focuses on long-distance migrations, table 6 shows quite clearly that most migrations were short-distance. By comparing both grids it appears that migrants travelled more than 50 kilometres to arrive in Armentières and afterwards only moved short distances. Nearly three quarters of all migrations in the second grid were within 20 kilometres of Armentières.

#### 4. MOBILITY

The 280 families migrated 931 times, which is an average of 3,3 times per family. Research shows that a family was either very mobile or not mobile at all. Families who migrated an average number of times were fairly rare.

Not mobile	Place of birth → Armentières	53	93
	Place of birth → x → Armentières	40	
Average	Place of birth → x → x → Armentières	30	39
	Place of birth → x → x → x → Armentières	9	
Very mobile	Place of birth → x → ... → x → Armentières	25	70
	Place of birth → x → ... → x → <i>gone</i>	45	
Unknown	Place of birth → Armentières → <i>gone</i>	32	78
	Place of birth → x → x → <i>gone</i>	25	
	Place of birth → x → x → x → <i>gone</i>	21	

The question remains whether emigrants from rural areas moved to a local town first before moving to France. Unfortunately, the filing cards do not provide this information. However, Belgian migration records tell us that between 1857 and 1900 about 9,500 citizens of Ghent and 6,500 people from the neighbouring communes moved abroad, i.e. 7.1 per cent and 3.5 per cent of the total population.<sup>14</sup> A townsman was about twice as likely to move abroad as a villager. But at least 6,500 villagers migrated without moving to a nearby town first.

My sample survey on Armentières shows similar results: 171 immigrants were born in Ghent and 91 in neighbouring villages (see table 7). While 31 per cent of all townsmen moved straight to Armentières, only 13 per cent of the villagers did the same. The remaining 87 per cent reached Armentières after a few stops. 14 per cent of the villagers moved to Ghent first, before leaving for Armentières. For the remaining 73 per cent it is impossible to know whether Ghent was their first stop. Nevertheless, the birthplaces of the wives of these migrants provide more details. Only 21 out of 91 villagers married a wife who was born in the district of Ghent. In 13 cases the wife was born in the city of Ghent and one wife was born in the same village as her husband.

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<sup>14</sup> National Institute for Statistics, Vital statistics, District of Ghent, 1857-1900. The official figures undoubtedly underestimate reality.

This already indicates that migrants from small villages were very mobile before marriage. In a quarter of all cases the migrants from Ghent married someone who was originally from that city too. Migrants from neighbouring villages did not leave for Ghent at a young age. In these cases, it appears that they mostly married inhabitants from Ghent. They could have migrated to Ghent during their childhood, but if they had, their migrations would have followed the same pattern as migrations of city dwellers. As I stated before, this was not the case. Villagers moved abroad less easily than city dwellers and when they did, Ghent was not necessarily their first destination. The assumption that towns were gateways to foreign countries obviously does not apply here.

### 5. RETURN MIGRATION

Return migration is traditionally seen as evidence that migration failed (Oris, 1993, 218; Kok, 1999, 13, 113). My research has different conclusions. More than one third of all return migrations (152 out of 424) did not have the district of Ghent as their destination. The fact that these Flemish families returned to a French commune they had left before, shows that return migration implies something different. Leaving a commune did not necessarily mean that the ambitions of migrants had turned sour. In 35.8 per cent of all cases, migrants returned to these communes. Again the hypothesis that migrations were an escape is proven to be incorrect. Table 8 shows the evolution of return migration during the migration-cycle.

<i>Migration</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Moves	280	227	155	100	70	39	24	15	8	5	2	2
Return	0	20	56	58	43	21	17	11	7	4	2	1
% return	0	8.8	36.1	58	61.4	53.8	70.8	73.3	87.5	100	100	50

As migrants moved more often, the percentage of return migrations increased. Yet we see that the third migration already reached the average of 36 per cent return migrations. This proves that the results were not really distorted by the nature of our sample. The very high percentages of return migrations from the fourth destination onwards indicate that the most mobile migrants migrated for other than economic reasons. Families had a social network in these communes which did not only allow, but even incited them to move. This explains the frequent travelling back and forth.

## 6. CHAIN MIGRATION

Family ties had a great impact on migration. On the one hand, the family background of the potential migrant seriously affected his or her decision to migrate, or not. On the other hand migration was also stimulated by relatives who had migrated before. This last aspect which is generally referred to as 'chain migration' is my following concern.

In 1957 T.Hägerstrand put forward the idea that migrants were motivated by past migrations rather than by present socio-economic circumstances (Rosental, 1999, 94). Since then the concept of 'chain migration' has become widespread. The crucial role of migrations by relatives has been generally acknowledged and particularly well documented for overseas migrations (Schurer, 1991, 135). Research has indicated that migrants stimulated the relatives they had left behind. They did not only send them letters full of promise, but quite often they financed their crossing to the New World. This was the case for 50 per cent of all Swedish migrants in the 1880s, 40 per cent of Norwegian migrants in the 1870s, 30 per cent of Finnish migrants between 1891 and 1914 and 25 per cent of Danish migrants between 1881 and 1895 (Hatton and Williamson, 1994, 544). The influence of relatives and acquaintances for nineteenth century overseas migrations appears to have been so huge that we can safely assume that they have also affected domestic and intra-European migrations. Yet studies on domestic migration do not usually refer to this influence or only sporadically do so. The last thirty years a small number of authors such as A. Neuman (1979), M. Gribaudo (1987), K. Schurer (1991), P.-A. Rosental (1999) and J. Kok (1999) have studied the importance of chain migration within Western Europe. Neuman's research, based on an analysis of censuses, showed that the influence exerted by early migrants was indeed strong. The other studies were mostly micro analyses of families that migrated, rather than dealing with the role of chain migration as such. Hence, the impact of chain migration on intra-European migration remains fairly vague and rests on assumptions rather than research. The amount of migrations which were inspired by familial networks are unknown and the extent to which chain migration was linked to economic factors is equally uncertain. My analysis attempts to answer these questions.

The sample survey includes 241 families whose names begin with the letters d, e, k, l, m and v. Because the files mention the names of the parents of the migrants, immediate family ties are revealed. The other family ties can only be suggested by a shared surname. This may over-accentuate the phenomenon, but in reality chain migration probably had a much greater impact than can be demonstrated here. Many relations remain, indeed, invisible. For instance, relatives who were not included in my sample survey and more distant in-laws and relatives for whom we have no files. Other than family ties cannot be studied at all.

	N	%
Total number of families	223	100
Number of families without nameselves	39	17.5
Number of families with nameselves	184	82.5
Number of families with immediate relatives	94 <sup>15</sup>	42.2

	N	Average per family
Total number of adult nameselves	329	1.8
Total number of immediate adult relatives	137	1.5

The results are displayed in tables 9 and 10. In 18 out of 241 cases the migrant was younger than 17 years upon arrival in Armentières. These migrants were excluded because children migrate automatically with their parents and do not consciously choose their destination. The total number of families was thus 223. 184 families or 82.5 per cent of our sample survey had nameselves included in the files. The 184 families had 329 nameselves between them, 137 were immediate family. So 82.5 per cent of the families had an average of 1.8 namesakes and 42.2 per cent had an average of 1.5 direct relations within the sample. So it seems that the Flemish population of Armentières had an intricate web of relatives. Since my research only discloses part of these family ties and I studied a very specific sort of long-distance migration, these are very impressive statistics. They confirm M. Oris hypothesis that *“les visions communes qui ont longtemps associé l’industrialisation à la disparition des liens familiaux et la déstabilisation des formes de solidarité communautaire traditionnelles”* need to be reconsidered (1997, 546).

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15. Ten of these families were immediately related to two family branches.

## 7. FAMILY NETWORKS AND EMPLOYMENT

Recent literature often states that nineteenth century workers found employment through social networks (Kok, 1999, 24, 41; Scholliers, 1996, 60, 108). P. Scholliers concluded that *"the recruitment of workers operate through the workers themselves, apparently without any direct initiative from the mill's management or overseer, though the final decision did of course lie with these"* (1996, 114). Early migrants informed relatives whenever there was a vacancy. These networks were clearly international. This assumption is very difficult to check in my files. Indeed, relatives were employed in the same industry, but this is not surprising as 66.5 per cent of all immigrants were employed in the textile industry. A striking example of the relation between family and trade was Anne Degeyter, born in Ghent, married to Joseph Evrard, 'Seigneur de Lin', in Halluin in 1854. One year later the couple left for Armentières. Thomas Degeyter, Ann's younger brother by seven years, moved to Armentières in 1857, also 'Seigneur de Lin'. It illustrates P.A. Rosental's conclusion that elder sisters could offer nice perspectives for their younger brothers (Rosental, 1999, 210).

## CONCLUSIONS

Macro research showed that there was no flight away from rural communes during industrialisation. The slow population growth in these communes was due to low immigration and not high emigration. Industrialisation did not provoke a flight away from rural communes but only influenced the direction of existing migration-flows. This discloses that migrations were not in the first place an escape. Subsistence migration only appeared during short periods of crisis. These migrations had nearby towns as a destination and were probably only temporary. The sources used for my micro-research were particularly informative on families that established themselves more or less permanently in Armentières during the second half of the nineteenth century. The findings indicate again that we should abandon the deep-rooted assumption that migration was born from necessity. Migration flows were indeed directed towards areas with better economic circumstances, but this does not imply that it was always the most impoverished and the most threatened families who left. Research proves that migration was mostly a positive choice and that the decision to migrate was less radical than often presumed. Rural families migrated directly to a large city and most of them did not make a stop in a Belgian town before moving to France. Then again, the high number of return migrations indicates that leaving a commune was not necessarily a sign of bad luck or defeated expectations. Many families later returned to a former residence. From the frequent travelling back and forth, I deduce that

families migrated for other than pure economic reasons. Most probably they had a social network in these communes, which encouraged migration. The study of family ties revealed a tangled network of relations: 82.5 per cent of the families had an average of 1.8 namesakes and 42.2 per cent had an average of 1.5 direct relations within the sample. Nevertheless, economic motives remained important. Migrants mainly left for places where the textile industry was strongly developed. I assume that family networks offered them opportunities of finding employment. In short, my research shows that the traditional relations between industrialisation and the emergence of migration-flows, or between migrants and the uprooted, are less important than generally assumed.

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**Van het ene textielcentrum naar het andere:  
migraties van het district Gent naar de stad Armentières  
tijdens de tweede helft van de 19de eeuw**

KATLEEN DILLEN

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SAMENVATTING

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Migratie wordt in de historische literatuur dikwijls beschouwd als een overlevingsstrategie en migranten als vluchtelingen. In dit artikel worden de beweegredenen van negentiende-eeuwse migranten op originele wijze onderzocht. Het onderzoek behandelt de migratiebewegingen in het arrondissement Gent tijdens de tweede helft van de negentiende eeuw. Er wordt dieper ingegaan op de relaties met Noord-Frankrijk via micro-onderzoek van 280 families die vanuit het arrondissement Gent naar Armentières emigreerden. Gent en Noord-Frankrijk waren beide belangrijke negentiende-eeuwse textielcentra, ongeveer 70 kilometer van elkaar verwijderd. De band tussen beide regio's was relatief hecht. In een eerste deel worden de immigratie- en emigratiebewegingen voor de Gentse gemeenten bestudeerd op basis van de loop van de bevolking. De bedoeling was na te gaan in hoeverre en op welke manier de aard van de gemeenten de migratiebewegingen beïnvloedde. Hiervoor werden vier categorieën onderscheiden: rurale gemeenten, proto-industriële gemeenten, industriële gemeenten en de stad Gent. Vergelijking van gemiddelde immigratie en emigratiecijfers gaf verrassende resultaten. De trage bevolkingsgroei van de rurale gemeenten werd niet veroorzaakt door grote emigratie, maar door lage immigratie. Hiermee werd aangetoond dat de industrialisering geen ontworteling van de rurale samenleving veroorzaakte, maar enkel de richting van de migraties heroriënteerde naar de industriële gemeenten. Migratie bleek dus eerder een natuurlijk gegeven dan een noodoplossing in tijden van crisis. Deze bevinding werd verder nagegaan aan de hand van micro-onderzoek naar de migratiebewegingen van 280 families die vanuit het arrondissement Gent naar Armentières vertrokken. Dit onderzoek gebeurde op basis van een vrij unieke bron, namelijk gezinsfiches opgemaakt door de stad Armentières. Deze fiches boden de mogelijkheid om enerzijds de reisroutes van de families te reconstrueren en anderzijds de familiebanden tussen de families onderling te bestuderen. Het onderzoek van de reisroutes toonde aan dat de meeste migratiebewegingen interstedelijk waren. Anderzijds werden door migranten die vanuit rurale gemeenten vertrokken nauwelijks tussenstappen in middelmatige gemeenten gedaan, zij verhuisden meestal rechtstreeks naar de stad. Dit impliceert dat migratie naar grote steden voor de plattelanders geen grote psychologische drempel inhield. De interessantste bevindingen betroffen

retourmigraties. Doorgaans worden deze beschouwd als het bewijs van het falen van migratie. De families in dit onderzoek keerden echter zeer frequent terug naar gemeenten die ze voordien hadden verlaten. Retourmigraties wijzen dus niet op ongeluk, maar tonen aan dat de families omwille van andere dan louter economische redenen migreerden. Wellicht was in deze gemeenten een sociaal netwerk opgebouwd dat migratie niet alleen vereenvoudigde, maar ook stimuleerde. Men kan aannemen dat de negentiende-eeuwse arbeiders via deze netwerken aan werk werden geholpen. Het belang van deze sociale netwerken in de negentiende-eeuwse maatschappij werd eveneens duidelijk in het derde luik van de studie, namelijk het onderzoek naar familiebanden binnen de steekproef. De families bleken één kluwen verwanten. Algemeen kan men dus besluiten dat de veronderstelde associaties tussen migratie en overlevingsstrategie of tussen industrialisatie en ontworteling van de rurale samenleving moeten worden herzien.

**D'un centre textile vers un autre: les mouvements migratoires  
du district de Gand vers la ville d'Armentières (France)  
pendant la deuxième moitié du XIXe siècle**

KATLEEN DILLEN

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RÉSUMÉ

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Les historiens considèrent souvent la migration comme une stratégie de survie et les migrants comme des réfugiés. Cet article étudie en profondeur les causes des mouvements migratoires dans l'arrondissement de Gand pendant la deuxième moitié du XIXe siècle. Les relations avec le Nord de la France sont étudiées de plus près par une micro-étude de 280 familles qui ont quitté l'arrondissement de Gand pour Armentières. La région de Gand et le Nord de la France étaient devenus tous deux des centres d'industrie textile très importants au cours du XIXe siècle. Distants de seulement 70 kilomètres, ils ont tissé entre eux une relation particulière. Dans un premier temps, j'étudie les mouvements migratoires au sein de l'arrondissement de Gand par le biais des chiffres d'immigration et d'émigration fournis pour chaque commune par les registres de mouvement de la population. Le but était d'examiner comment et dans quelle mesure la nature des communes influençait les migrations. J'ai établi quatre catégories: des communes rurales, des communes proto-industrielles, des communes industrielles et la ville Gand. La comparaison des chiffres moyens d'émigration et d'immigration a révélé un résultat assez surprenant. La paralysie de la croissance des communes rurales n'était pas suscitée par une émigration élevée, mais par des chiffres d'immigration très limités. Ceci démontre que l'industrialisation n'a pas entraîné un 'exode rural'; elle n'a fait que dévier les mouvements migratoires vers les communes industrialisées. La migration apparaît alors comme un phénomène naturel et non pas comme une mesure de survie. Dans un deuxième temps, ce constat a été vérifié par une micro-recherche menée sur les mouvements migratoires de 280 familles qui ont quitté l'arrondissement de Gand pour Armentières. Des fiches de famille, établies par la ville d'Armentières, mentionnent pour chaque famille, en plus des informations générales, les communes d'arrivée et de destination en cas de migrations et aussi les noms des parents du chef de famille et de sa femme. Les fiches offrent donc la possibilité de reconstruire les itinéraires et, d'autre part, d'étudier les liens familiaux au sein de l'échantillon. L'étude des itinéraires a d'abord démontré que la majorité des mouvements était interurbains. Les familles en provenance de communes rurales déménageaient dans la plupart des cas directement vers des villes, sans faire d'étapes intermédiaires. Apparemment la migration vers les grandes villes ne constituait pas un pas psychologique insurmontable pour les ruraux. Les constatations les plus intéressantes concernent les migrations-retour, généralement consi-

dérées comme des preuves d'expériences migratoires décevantes. Toutefois, les familles que j'ai étudiées retournaient régulièrement vers des communes qu'elles avaient quittées auparavant. Ceci démontre que les migrations-retour ne résultent pas nécessairement d'un échec; au contraire, leur existence prouve que les familles ne déménageaient pas uniquement pour des motifs macro-économiques. Elles avaient probablement tissé dans ces communes un réseau social qui facilitait et stimulait les migrations et grâce auxquelles les ouvriers trouvaient de l'emploi. L'importance de ce type de réseaux est également révélée dans le troisième volet de l'analyse, relative à l'étude des liens familiaux au sein de l'échantillon. Les migrants apparaissaient imbriqués dans un réseau de liens familiaux. En conclusion, l'association consacrée entre les migrations et la déstabilisation des formes de solidarité traditionnelles, ainsi qu'entre l'industrialisation et le déracinement des campagnes, doit être revue.