

## PHD RESEARCH

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### **'Education in Turmoil'. A history of Catholic secondary education during the Second World War in Belgium -**

[Original Title : *Onderwijs in het oog van de storm. Een geschiedenis van het katholiek middelbaar onderwijs tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog in België*]

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At the basis of the dissertation lies the question whether the German military occupation of Belgium during the Second World War affected the development of Catholic secondary education for boys. More specifically, this study investigates the nature of the educational policy of the German military government during the Second World War. It deals with the question as to what extent the occupier applied the educational system as a (political) tool for gaining acceptance for the regime across the layers of society.

It also focuses on the relation between the German regime and the Roman Catholic Church which held authority over the network of (unsubsidized) private schools. This dissertation above all answers the question about the extent to which the war and external political situation penetrated the classroom, and whether or not teachers and pupils were politically engaged for or against the German regime. Lastly, this study focuses on patterns in the war memories of teachers in Episcopal secondary schools and pupils in Jesuit secondary schools in both Flanders and Wallonia, and frames them within current historiography.

This study shows that German educational policy was founded on a so-called *Gleich-*

*schaltung* ("coordination" or "unification") of the Belgian educational system. The restriction of Episcopal power over education and the reversal of the development of Catholic schools were important conditions for the German regime's aspiration of total control and power. Yet the German occupation of Belgium cannot be considered as a unilateral imposition of German rules and control. The Catholic Church and its schools were not merely victims of the occupation. The war and German occupation did not radically change the Catholic school culture, but stirred up new dynamics from below.