

PHD RESEARCH

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Mediterranean Immigrants in the City of Ghent, 1960-1980. A Historical Study of Immigration, Settlement and Integration processes

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In the field of migration history, the history of post-war labour migration to Western Europe has been receiving the attention from an increasing number of scholars, especially since the beginning of the new millennium. Through applying a historical lens to a subject that has been studied by social scientists for decades, historians are trying to contextualize this migration stream, debunk some of its ancient myths and uncover the historical realities of the relatively under-researched period before the migration stops of the mid-1970s. Taking the integration processes of Mediterranean immigrants in the Belgian city of Ghent over the course of the 1960s and 1970s as a case study, this thesis engages with both the sociological and historical literature on the subject. It studies the ways in which these immigrants have constructed their lives in an urban environment over the course of the first decades after their arrival, dealing with the structural elements that framed their integration processes, looking at the strategies they used in order to realize their goals and focusing on their social life-worlds and the networks they created. In addition to a detailed narrative of these structural and social integration processes, the thesis also provides a thorough analysis of the interplay of structure and agency in these processes, following Nancy Green's call for a poststructural structuralist approach. Further, it studies the integration processes of immigrants from a multi-dimensional rather than an ethnic-focused perspective.

The thesis also takes a critical stance towards phenomena that are generally qualified as 'ethnic', and pays special attention to those aspects of immigrants' lives that crossed ethnic boundaries. What comes to the fore is a picture of post-war 'guest worker' populations that is characterized by more agency and less ethnicity, less homogeneity and more interethnic interaction than is generally the case.