

Poverty research or research poverty? The interaction between civil society researchers and scientists before, during and after the 'rediscovery of poverty' in postwar Belgium

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In the 1960s, poverty resurfaced quite spectacularly in academic circles, a feat attributed to the publications of John Galbraith's *The Affluent Society* (1957) and Michael Harrington's *The Other America* (1962).¹ In the midst of the welfare optimism that dominated western societies, these academics discovered the existence of a 'modern' kind of poverty, different from 'old' forms of poverty.² What followed came to be known as the 'rediscovery of poverty': a surge in academic, political and popular attention for poverty in the US and Europe.

While as early as the 1970s some scholars have remarked that the term 'rediscovery' was ill-chosen, the phrase nevertheless continued to be used in scientific works on poverty up until today.³ Recently, however, criticism of the narrative of the 'rediscovery of poverty' have become more substantiated. Both Daniel Victor Aksamit (for the US) and Daniel Zamora Vargas (for France and Belgium) have argued that poverty was not rediscovered but re-invented.⁴ During the sixties, 'old' poverty – said to be found in prewar or non-western countries – had been framed as distinctly different from the 'new' poverty found in welfare societies. This reconceptualization of poverty allowed scholars in the sixties to refocus their studies from problems of housing and unequal income distribution towards a more holistic understanding of 'poverty'.

Both the adherents and the critics of the 'rediscovery'-thesis agree that the shifts of the mid-sixties contributed to a remarkable surge of academic interest in poverty. The most thorough reflections on poverty knowledge in the postwar era can be found in Alice O'Connor's 2002 book, in which she traces the changing conceptions on poverty and their influence on politics and social science in the United States.⁵ In her work, O'Connor hints at the impact of civil society actors – in her case large foundations

¹ John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*, 14th pr., Mentor Books MT 534 (New York (N.Y.): New American library, 1958); Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States*, Penguin Specials 223 (Harmondsworth: Penguin books, 1963); Daniel Victor Aksamit, "'Absolutely Sort of Normal': The Common Origins of the War on Poverty at Home and Abroad, 1961-1965" (Kansas State University, 2014).

² Jeroen Barrez, 'Voorbij het "goud" van de jaren zestig. Armoedepercepties in de welvaartsstaat in België (1958-1973)', *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* XLVIII, no. 4 (2018): 8–38; Axelle Brodiez-Dolino, *Combattre la pauvreté: vulnérabilités sociales et sanitaires de 1880 à nos jours* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2013); Daniel Zamora Vargas, 'How Poverty Became a Violation of Human Rights: The Production of a New Political Subject, France and Belgium, 1964–88', *History of Political Economy* 52, no. 3 (1 June 2020): 499–517, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00182702-8304823>.

³ Jan Vranken, 'Armoede in de Welvaartsstaat. Een Posing Tot Historische En Structurele Plaatsing' (Wilrijk, UFSIA, 1977), 9–14.

⁴ Aksamit, 'Absolutely Sort of Normal'; Zamora Vargas, 'How Poverty Became a Violation of Human Rights'.

⁵ Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century US History*, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2002).

– in the conceptualization and the advancement of knowledge about poverty.⁶ This theme was further developed by Zamora Vargas. Working on France and Belgium, he argues that it was only when a more unified concept of poverty had been solidified in civil society that poverty could become an enticing subject for academic research in the 1960s, from where it developed into a core focus of social sciences and social work.⁷

Vargas' work shows that not scientists but civil society actors lay at the heart of the surge of intellectual attention: they actively contributed to the production of knowledge on poverty issues. However, these poverty actors have rarely, if ever, been approached as legitimate knowledge producers, certainly not after poverty had been 'rediscovered' in academia. Rather, studies focus on the political reception of policy-oriented ideas proposed by poverty initiatives. In a rare study on the collaboration between lay knowledge producer ATD Quart Monde and academic sociologists, historian Christiane Reinecke has shown how interpretations of homelessness by civil society were rejected by academics but nevertheless exerted a major influence on policy makers.⁸ Research on the political incorporation of activists' knowledge can however not replace research on the circulation of knowledge (or the absence thereof) between civil society and academia. In this paper, we aim to explore these largely ignored interactions between lay and academic knowledge production on poverty.

Historians of science are increasingly examining the boundaries existing at a given time and culture within which science could be produced as well as the types of knowledge that coexisted and were or were not considered to be valid.⁹ This broadening of the history of science into a history of knowledge has allowed for more knowledge producers to receive attention: scholars from the humanities, non-Western scholars, artisans, female 'amateurs' as well as activist researchers.¹⁰ The shifting boundaries between scientific and non-scientific types of knowledge have in this process received increasing attention.¹¹ Who is allowed to produce knowledge and who acts as a gatekeeper? Who is capable of

⁶ Alice O'Connor, 'Poverty Knowledge and the History of Poverty Research', ed. David Brady and Linda M. Burton 1 (5 April 2017): 11 of 25, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199914050.013.9>; O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 124.

⁷ Daniel Zamora Vargas, *De l'égalité à la pauvreté. Une socio-histoire de l'assistance en Belgique (1895-2015)*, Sociologie et anthropologie (Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, ULB Université Libre de Bruxelles, 2018); Zamora Vargas, 'How Poverty Became a Violation of Human Rights'.

⁸ Christiane Reinecke, 'Localising the Social: The Rediscovery of Urban Poverty in Western European "Affluent Societies"', *Contemporary European History* 24, no. 4 (2015): 555–76.

⁹ Lorraine Daston, 'The History of Science and the History of Knowledge', *Know: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge* 1, no. 1 (2017): 131–54.

¹⁰ Lukas M. Verburgt, 'The History of Knowledge and the Future History of Ignorance', *KNOW: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge* 4, no. 1 (March 2020): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1086/708341>.

¹¹ Lorenzo Peña, 'The Boundary between Scientific and Non-Scientific Knowledge', June 1991, <https://digital.csic.es/handle/10261/16895>; Anna Mikulak, 'Mismatches between "Scientific" and "Non-Scientific" Ways of Knowing and Their Contributions to Public Understanding of Science', *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science* 45, no. 2 (1 June 2011): 201–15, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12124-011-9157-8>.

knowing and what kinds of knowledge are deemed valuable? By posing these kinds of questions, historians of knowledge have identified different categories of knowledge and knowledge producers. Whereas historians of modern science have often ignored non-academic knowledge producers, historians of knowledge aim to focus more on the co-existence or even the co-production of knowledge by lay and academic scientists.¹²

In this article, we will situate both academic and lay research on poverty in the field of knowledge production in order to assess whether and how both scientific and non-scientific types of knowledge co-existed and possibly interacted. We will demonstrate how a field of research was first characterized by a lack of academic interest and subsequently by diverse interactions between established civil society researchers and academic scholars. We will show that this was not a straightforward process of belated academic discovery of a problem that was first conceptualized by civil society, nor a simple migration of knowledge from civil society to academia.

We focus on Belgium, a country characterized since the nineteenth century by a rich field of mostly Catholic poor relief organizations. The country's liberal constitution of 1831 had allowed Catholics, which represented the majority of the population and its elites, to develop their own organizational field, resulting in an 'empire by invitation' in the areas of social assistance, health care and education.¹³ In the last third of the century, the *de facto* monopoly of this Catholic 'pillar' became challenged by the emergence of two more (although smaller) ideologically based pillars, one socialist and another liberal. In the course of the twentieth century, each of these pillars, which included political parties and trade unions, developed expertise with regard to problems of welfare. This ideological division also fundamentally characterized Belgium's academic life, where since the nineteenth century two state universities (Ghent and Liege) coexisted with a Catholic university (Leuven) and a freethinking one (Brussels). With the exception of Brussels, where an autonomous institute of sociology was established around 1900, the institutionalization of the social sciences was rather slow and weak within the Belgian academic landscape.¹⁴

As of 1944, the Belgian State took on the responsibility of being the main provider of social support with the introduction of the so-called Social Pact.¹⁵ Social security was organized through the existing

¹² See, for example, Cyril Fiorini, 'Quand l'objet et le terrain de recherche valent avec l'engagement. Thèse et mission d'expertise sur la co-production des savoirs', 2023.

¹³ Vincent Viaene, *Belgium and the Holy See from Gregory XVI to Pius IX (1831-1859): Catholic Revival, Society and Politics in 19th-Century Europe*, Institut Historique Belge de Rome. Bibliothèque 50 (Leuven: University Press, 2001).

¹⁴ Kaat Wils and Anne Rasmussen, 'Sociology in a Transnational Perspective: Brussels, 1890-1925', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'histoire* 90, no. 4 (2012): 1273-96, <https://doi.org/10.3406/rbph.2012.8286>; Raf Vanderstraeten and Kaat Louckx, *Sociology in Belgium* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-55663-9>.

¹⁵ Patrick T. Pasture, 'The April 1944 "Social Pact" in Belgium and Its Significance for the Post-War Welfare State', *Journal of Contemporary History* 28, no. 4 (October 1993): 696, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200949302800407>; Guy Vanthemsche, *De beginjaren van de sociale zekerheid in België, 1944-1963*, 2de dr., Balans (Brussel: VUBpress, 2014).

pillars by subsidizing each pillar according to its membership number. Whilst the welfare state could thus make use from its onset of a large pillarized infrastructure, scholars have abundantly shown that the welfare state was not all-encompassing. Groups like the young, the disabled and the elderly still needed to rely on the help of charitable organisations, often of a Catholic slant.¹⁶ These specific contextual factors explain why Catholics or at least people who were somehow connected to the Catholic pillar will take centre stage in the following pages, even though we have not treated religion as an analytical category in our research.

We start with the research impetus that was given by mainly Catholic individuals and organisations from the late 1950s onward which failed to resonate within academic circles. In a second step, we analyse the academic 'rediscovery' of poverty around 1970 and its ambiguous relationship with earlier and ongoing lay knowledge production. In a third step, we highlight how new activist conceptions of embodied knowledge gained ground within the movement of ATD Quart Monde and how this new perspective again affected relationships with academia.

The making of poverty: pioneers in Belgian poverty research

The first book-length study on the problem of poverty in post-war Belgium was a collective enterprise, led by the Catholic priest Edouard Froidure. The book, which appeared in 1957, was entitled *Parias 57. The underpaid [infra-salariés]. The slums. The morally abandoned children*. As the title suggests, the book consisted of three different, thematically structured parts. The two last themes, poor housing conditions and the situation of children who did not grow up in a stable family, had been on Froidure's agenda since about 1930, when he had started to work in one of Brussels poor worker-parishes. With his analysis, Froidure added to a large body of existing literature in which metropolitan living conditions were meticulously documented and denounced in a narrative style which combined social reformism and moral alarmism.¹⁷ The first part of the book was more original and ambitious: it aimed to present a systematic and statistically supported typology of adults and families who did not have sufficient financial means to live a decent life.

¹⁶ For liberalism and socialism, the welfare state had to offer all-encompassing help for people in need. When certain groups suffered from not having access, the State should intervene. On the Catholic nature of poor relief Barrez, 'Voorbij het "goud" van de jaren zestig', 24; Brodiez-Dolino, *Combattre la pauvreté*, 203.

¹⁷ For the discourse on slumming, see Patricia Van den Eeckhout, 'Krotten Als Metafoor Voor Een Verrotte Maatschappij. Les Taudis (1922) van Léon Degrelle', *Bijdragen Tot de Eigentijdse Geschiedenis*, no. 23 (2011): 95–121; On the growing concerns on youth delinquency, see e.g. Margo De Koster Niget David, 'Scientific Expertise in Child Protection Policies and Juvenile Justice Practices in Twentieth-Century Belgium', in *Scientists' Expertise as Performance* (Routledge, 2015); Benoît Majerus and Veerle Massin, 'Des psychiatres et des enfants : une histoire belge autour du congrès de 1937', *Revue d'histoire de l'enfance « irrégulière »*. *Le Temps de l'histoire*, no. 18 (30 November 2016): 149–66, <https://doi.org/10.4000/rhei.3924>.

Even though Froidure can be considered as a 'first' or a 'pioneer' when tracing the history of poverty research, his intellectual trajectory and his methodological choices were quite representative of broader intellectual tendencies in predominantly Catholic Belgium in the first half of the twentieth century. Before entering in 1922 the Malines seminary to prepare for priesthood, Froidure had received a bachelors' education in the Humanities at the Catholic Brussels college Saint-Louis and a bachelor's degree in Thomistic philosophy at the Catholic University of Leuven's Institute of Philosophy. While this was by no means a thorough academic training, Froidure must have been introduced in the neo-Thomist approach to sociology which was prominent at the Leuven Institute. In response to the perceived threat of positivism and atheism which was associated with the new academic field of sociology, a specifically Catholic model of social science was developed in Leuven. It owed much to the methods of the French mid-nineteenth century Catholic researcher of family budgets Frédéric Le Play.¹⁸

In the 1920s, Froidure combined a teaching assignment in history and geography in a Catholic secondary school with involvement in workers' youth organizations of the Catholic Action, a movement stimulated by Pope Pius XI to encourage lay apostolate under the direction of the clergy. In Belgium, this youth movement was led by priest Jozef Cardijn. Cardijn was also trained in Leuven in the method of Le Play. Performing social research on the living conditions of young workers through interviews based on thematic questionnaires became a key practice within the movement, in Belgium as well as in France. For Cardijn, it was part of a broader action-oriented methodology, summarized as 'observe, judge, act'.¹⁹ Froidure's 1957 book project would perfectly mirror this adagium, combining empirical data, moral and religious reflections and a call for action.

From the 1930s onwards, Froidure became fully involved in developing initiatives for poor children living in Brussels' many slums. Immediately after the war, which he had partly spent in German camps as a political prisoner, his expertise in the field of children's leisure was recognized within the Catholic world. He was offered a part-time teaching position in the young Leuven university's Institute for Physical Education.²⁰ His course which was entitled 'Moral Education in Leisure Activities' testified of his more general philosophical and moral rather than scientific orientation. Indeed, his scholarly connections with ongoing work in the social sciences in Belgian universities was probably non-

¹⁸ Kaat Wils, 'Les intellectuels catholiques et la sociologie en Belgique, 1880-1914', *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, no. 179 (1 September 2017): 71–88, <https://doi.org/10.4000/assr.29588>; Bernard Kalaora and Antoine Savoye, *Les inventeurs oubliés: Le Play et ses continuateurs aux origines des sciences sociales* (Editions Champ Vallon, 1989).

¹⁹ Éric Geerkens and Xavier Vigna, 'Les enquêtes jocistes en Belgique et en France, c. 1925 – c. 1940', in *Les enquêtes ouvrières dans l'Europe contemporaine*, Recherches (Paris: La Découverte, 2019), 426–42, <https://doi.org/10.3917/dec.geerk.2019.01.0426>; Emmanuel Gerard, *Een nooit voltooide geschiedenis. 150 jaar sociale wetenschappen in Leuven*. (Leuven: LannooCampus, 2022), 204.

²⁰ Pascal Delheye, Thomas Ameye, and Hans Vangrunderbeek, 'In I.L.O. tempore'. *Verbeeld verleden van de Faculteit Bewegings- en Revalidatiewetenschappen aan de Katholieke Universiteit Leuven 1937-2007* (UPL in Context; Leuven, 2008).

existent. As of the 1950s, the academic field of the social sciences was in full expansion in Leuven and elsewhere. Statistical methods of social research for instance developed into a specific research and teaching topic. While much policy-oriented research was performed at the different Belgian universities, poverty as such was not on the research agenda.²¹ Froidure did not reach out to these researchers, but rather situated himself in the tradition of Le Play by referring to social studies such as those by the French Dominican priest Louis-Joseph Lebret.²²

Froidure's daily contact with impoverished people made him aware of the silence about their suffering in media and on policy levels. In order to increase public awareness and to exert pressure on decision-makers to take political action, Froidure started to search for numbers on how many people in Belgium actually lived in a state of 'misery'.²³ According to Froidure, the lack of knowledge on 'miserable people' had resulted in a lack of charitable donations from well-off Belgians. It triggered him to start gathering information and numbers from "ministries, joint and other committees", all with the aim of making the larger public aware of the great but forgotten suffering in their society.²⁴ In his book *Parias 57*, Froidure established a comprehensive classification system with 32 kinds of 'underpaid' people to demonstrate that there was quite a large and dispersed group of people who were unable to benefit from the fruits of the welfare state. Their state of 'misery' was determined on the basis of their income and the services they received in return from the welfare state.²⁵ A cost-benefit analysis was made for each group in society in relation to contributions to and assistance from welfare state services, with the 'miserable' always losing out according to these statistics.²⁶

Froidure's methodology consisted of a combination of a family-budget oriented approach in the Leplaysian tradition, with ample case-studies and clear moralist and alarmist overtones, and a statistical approach which mainly consisted in counting and regrouping on the basis of different data stemming from government-issued statistical overviews. In doing so, he continued a tradition of numerical mapping of social phenomena and problems launched in the nineteenth century by Belgian researchers and social reformists Adolphe Quetelet and Edouard Ducpétiaux.²⁷ In order to strengthen the connection between the reader and the poor, Froidure added personal life stories of the *infra-*

²¹ Gerard, *Een nooit voltooid geschiedenis. 150 jaar sociale wetenschappen in Leuven.*, 76–77; Vanderstraeten and Louckx, *Sociology in Belgium*, 51–52. Cécile Vanderpelen-Diagre, 'Des chiffres et des hommes: Les catholiques belges et la sociologie universitaire (1939-1970)', *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, no. 179 (1 September 2017): 129-146, <https://doi.org/10.4000/assr.29615>.

²² See Denis Pelletier, 'Engagement intellectuel catholique et médiation du social. L'enquête monographique de Le Play à Lebret', *Mil neuf cent* 13, no. 1 (1995): 25–45, <https://doi.org/10.3406/mcm.1995.1130>.

²³ Edouard Froidure, *Paria's 57: de onder-beloonden, de krotten, de moreel verlaten kinderen*, trans. Marcel Polfliet (Brussel: Openluchtwerken, 1958), 27–28.

²⁴ Froidure, 40.

²⁵ Froidure, 61.

²⁶ Zamora Vargas, 'How Poverty Became a Violation of Human Rights', 505.

²⁷ Vanderstraeten and Louckx, *Sociology in Belgium*, 6.

salariés. By mixing statistics and personal stories, Froidure tried to strike a balance between presenting himself as a neutral expert and connecting to his Catholic readership.

Froidure's book was entirely aimed at a Christian readership that, through moral indignation, should also move the ministers of the Christian-Democratic party (as the Catholic party was named by then) into policy changes. The Christian character of the book was emphasised by the interest shown by the Pope himself. Shortly after *Parias 57* was published, Froidure visited Pope Pius XII with a group of youngsters from his summer camps and offered him a copy of his work. The Pope subsequently quoted the book in a speech, an event which was broadly reported upon in the Belgian Catholic press.²⁸ Indeed, this first Belgian book on postwar poverty was very much versed in a Catholic way of thinking. Froidure's drive was not the lack of academic interest, but the waning of 'good Christian behaviour' and the subsequent loss of financial resources for poverty organisations. As Jan Vranken and Jeroen Barrez have argued, religious organisations in Belgium were vital in raising awareness for the poverty problem after World War II; Froidure has without any doubt been one of the main actors in this field.²⁹

Parias 57 was well received in Belgian society. Almost all newspapers carried at least a brief piece about the book.³⁰ The reviews praised Froidure for his candour, thoroughness and courage in writing about a sensitive and socially significant topic. The numbers used by Froidure to estimate the amount of 'miserable' people living in Belgium started to circulate widely, not only in Catholic circles, and in this process came to be considered as fixed numbers rather than estimations. In the Chamber of Representatives, the socialist Arthur De Sweemer for instance used Froidure's statistics in 1959 to denounce the wealth of entrepreneurs.³¹ Froidure was presented as an expert, having both a moral authority as priest and former war hero and a scientific authority thanks to his academic teaching position.

Froidure was however disappointed the media's tendency to reduce their newfound interest in the problems of *les infra-salariés* to the issue of slums. The 1950s were characterised by a strong relationship between housing and poverty, which Froidure too found challenging to overcome.³² The priest was already an established expert in the slumming problem of the capital.³³ However important the slumming problem was to Froidure, in *Parias* 57, he had attempted to broaden the understanding

²⁸ E.g. 'Parias 57', *La Croix de Belgique*, 19/5/1957; "Au secours des infra-salaries », *Le Témoignage Chrétien*, 10/5/1957.

²⁹ Jan Vranken, *Armoede in België, eindree: Jan Vranken.*, 2e druk, Cahiers wit zwart (Antwerpen: De Nederlandsche boekhandel, 1974), 17; Barrez, 'Voorbij het "goud" van de jaren zestig', 14.

³⁰ ARCA, Papiers Edouard Froidure (PEF), Ses publications, folder 420-450.

³¹ Plenum, 14 January 1959, p.10. [Belgian Chamber of Representatives • Session of 14 January 1959 - plenum.be \(google.com\)](https://plenum.be/google.com)

³² Zamora Vargas, 'How Poverty Became a Violation of Human Rights', 502.

³³ Froidure, *Paria's* 57, 26.

of the problems of slum-inhabitants, not narrowing them down to housing problems. To no avail: the subject of inadequate housing — which had been high on the public and governmental agenda during the interwar period — remained the focus in Belgium's major newspapers. Because of the media's focus on slums, the public outrage narrowed down to post-war housing conditions as well, rather than on the accessibility of social services. Therefore, and much to Froidure's dismay, political events would only occur on the former.

In the Belgian Chamber of Representatives in 1957, the Christian-Democrat Désiré Lamalle for instance stated that “to get this population [*les infra-salariés* to which Froidure refers] out of their misery, multiple reforms are needed. However, the fight against slums is an essential element, a *sine qua non* of success”.³⁴ Later, on 20 March 1959, a bill was debated in the House of Representatives to establish a “State Slum Clearance Fund”, for which Froidure had argued in his book.³⁵ *Parias 57* was specifically addressed in the proposal. Already in 1953, less than a year after a surprise visit of king Baudouin with Froidure to the slums, Froidure had been cited as an expert on the subject in the discussions that led to the approval of a law which allowed cities to buy, demolish and renovate slums in exchange for a monetary compensation.³⁶ Later, Froidure would voice his dissatisfaction with the bill in particular and with the book's meagre measurable influence at large.³⁷ Whilst Froidure himself did not mention a lack of knowledge about the ‘miserable’ in society, he did voice a general lack of understanding of the interplay of different kinds of misery within certain social groups. *Parias 57* had not had enough impact on a social and political level because the problem had been immediately reduced to housing, he believed.

Parias 57 was only one event in a series of mediatic appearances of (Catholic) priests who tried to show what kind of hardship was not being prevented by the welfare state to expose its flaws and – in the end – get politicians to enlarge the welfare state so that it would encompass all social needs. Besides Froidure's media offensive with King Baudouin (1952) and the Pope's promotion of his book (1957), abbé Pierre (1954) and abbé Wresinski (1956) aroused interest with their much-discussed media appearances for the impoverished in France. These big media appearances had not delivered upon expectations in Belgium, but they had alerted caregivers to their common goal. From the 1960s onwards, some key figures in the field of caregiving started to become aware that, whilst they targeted different groups of struggling people, they addressed the same problems with the same kind

³⁴ Plenum, Belgian Chamber of Representatives Proceedings of the plenary sessions, 25 June 1957, p. 11. [Belgian Chamber of Representatives • Session of 25 June 1957 - plenum.be \(google.com\)](https://plenum.be/google.com)

³⁵ Froidure, *Paria's 57*, 409.

³⁶ Michel De Beule, *Brussel: geplande geschiedenis : stedenbouw in de 19e en 20e eeuw* (Bruxelles: Meert, 2017), 398.

³⁷ Froidure, « Entretien avec un journaliste nommé Lurkin », 9/1971, ARCA, Papiers Edouard Froidure, Sa lutte contre la pauvreté, box 364-388, 2-3.

of activities. In 1965, Froidure managed to found an umbrella organisation for civil society actors of all denominations that committed themselves to aid 'disinherited people' in 1965.

Just like Froidure had portrayed himself as the spokesperson of the *infra-salariés*, the National Action for Vital Security (*Action Nationale de Sécurité Vital / Nationale Aktie voor Bestaanszekerheid*) was conceived as the representative of the less fortunate in (national) politics. The organisation combined almost a hundred actors from different subfields,³⁸ and its main goal was "to take action against poverty in all its forms and to use all means at its disposal", which according to the National Action amounted to establishing a minimum subsistence level in Belgium.³⁹ The organizers took their duty as advocates to heart. To properly lobby for political change, the National Action members' expertise was pooled into five working groups — 'socially maladjusted adults', 'housing', 'disability', 'maladjusted youth', and 'the elderly in need' — which produced monthly reports and policy recommendations.

Meanwhile, the proclamation of the War on Poverty in America, in 1963, had brought the problem of poverty on the international forum. In the US, the War quickly resulted in the transformation of poverty knowledge, steering it, in O'Connor's words, "from an uncertainly connected bundle of university-based sociological and anthropological community studies, into a precise, federally funded analytic science with national-level data sets and neoclassical economic models at its core".⁴⁰ The impact of the American War on Poverty was certainly feasible in Europe, where it supplemented attention for the poor and caused the spread of scientific interest into poverty to outside the field of caregivers.⁴¹ The first publication in Belgium that testifies to this was of the Christian's party's research centre. In a short paper, only four pages long, Jean-Luc Dehaene introduced the idea of poverty in affluent societies to the Belgian scientifically engaged public in 1965.⁴² Dehaene, who had just begun working for the Christian's party's study department, would soon advance to become the division's head (1968) and then prime minister (1992-1999). In his short article on poverty, Dehaene did not show any consciousness of Froidure's or other experts' work already existing in the field, solely mentioning the newfound international academic literature on the topic.⁴³

Together, the American declaration of the War on Poverty and the grouping of societal problems into a more coherent notion of poverty, painfully showed how the problems of poverty were shrouded in

³⁸ CRISP, 'Le problème des déshérités en Belgique.', *CRISP. Courrier hebdomadaire* 379 (1967): 5; Barrez, 'Voorbij het "goud" van de jaren zestig', 25.

³⁹ Informatiedossier Nationale Aktie voor Bestaanszekerheid, 1-9-1966, KBR.

⁴⁰ O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 166.

⁴¹ Vranken, 'Armoede in de Welvaartsstaat. Een Poging Tot Historische En Structurele Plaatsing', 14.

⁴² Jean-Luc Dehaene, 'De Armoede in de Welvaartstaten', *De Gids Op Maatschappelijk Gebied*, 1965, 1067–71.

⁴³ He mainly mentioned a Dutch report on the 'lowest paid', alongside works on the US and France. Dehaene.

ignorance from the main knowledge producers in society.⁴⁴ With *Parias* 57, Froidure had experienced how great (but short-lived) the impact of solid study work could be, so when the National Action was founded in this momentum of 1965, the members of the National Action decided to continuously study and publish on all the related problems of the 'disinherited'.

Partners in policy? Cooperation and competition between academia and civil society actors

Soon enough, the National Action made it clear it wanted partners in its quest for knowledge. It strongly encouraged studies that could substantiate its own findings, whether conducted in political research bureaus or in the academic world. In 1966, the actors stipulated in a letter to the vice prime minister that:

"We underline the urgent demands for the Government to take the initiative to carry out or commission studies and systematic surveys in order to draw up a general plan of action against the misery. [...] The 4 universities are willing to contribute to this research".⁴⁵

One of the participating organisations, the conferences of Saint-Vincent à Paulo, informed its members that "the inventory and the systematic study of the numerous problems are to be undertaken by the four universities, but some working groups have already started their work within the organization [National Action]".⁴⁶

In 1967, the academic Centre de Recherche et d'Information Socio-Politiques (CRISP, Centre for Socio-Political Research and Information), an independent research centre studying political decision-making, published its first report on "the problem of the disinherited in Belgium", thereby taking over the discourse of the civil society actors.⁴⁷ Again, the CRISP tried to estimate the number of people experiencing some kind of poverty.⁴⁸ The table of contents of CRISP, as well, contained some very recognisable topics for the readers of the National Action's monthly updates. Indeed, the publication of CRISP was a direct testimony of the influence of National Action. CRISP mentioned the

⁴⁴ In the US as well, a segmented field of research on excluded groups were being combined in order to perform social research into poverty in the 1960s, see O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 11–12.

⁴⁵ Informatiedossier 31/10/1966, KBR

⁴⁶ Van der Ghinst, 'Nationale aktie voor bestaanszekerheid', *tijdschrift van het sint-vincentius a paulo genootschap in belgië*, 9/1966, 173.

⁴⁷ CRISP, 'Le problème des déshérités en Belgique.'

⁴⁸ Barrez, 'Voorbij het "goud" van de jaren zestig', 28.

association at length, stipulating its goals, main members and achievements. Furthermore, the report explicitly linked the National Action to the recent attention given to poverty, albeit cautiously:

“It is obviously difficult to measure the influence played by the National Action for Vital Security in the awareness by the public authorities both of the very existence of a problem of the disinherited and of their responsibilities in this regard. It should however be noted – without looking for a cause and effect relationship – that this awareness is developing in parallel with the increasingly numerous and urgent steps taken by this association”.⁴⁹

CRISP was only the first of many research groups to study problems of poverty. Throughout the country, research groups appeared at universities that were aimed at studying societal issues, amongst which poverty was becoming an important topic. The University of Antwerp followed suit in 1972 with the founding of Centre for Social Policy (CSB, *Centrum voor Sociaal Beleid*), specialised in evaluating social policy of the welfare state.⁵⁰ This centre, too, would devote some of its first studies to poverty and combined economy, sociology and legal paradigms.⁵¹ In 1966, the National Action participated in the founding of an interdisciplinary research group at the Catholic University of Leuven, with aimed to generate an inventory of “the problems of misery in Belgium, together with a census of all the achievements, research and work already done”.⁵² They were probably referring to the workgroup ‘Alternative Economy’ (*Alternatieve Economie*), a group of junior economists and sociologists, who published a booklet titled *Armoede in België* (Poverty in Belgium) in 1972.⁵³ Some of its members already presented their insights at the Tenth Flemish Scientific Economic Congress in 1971, poverty was one of the topics for the panel that worked on the development of needs in society.⁵⁴

One of the places where the results of these first studies were being disseminated, was the Belgian *Journal for Social Security* (*Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Sociale Zekerheid*), founded in 1959. The journal was an initiative of the Ministry of Social Security and aimed to “defend and clarify” social security issues.⁵⁵ The journal brought together political and academic papers on all topics of social security, including issues of poverty. Already in 1959, a one-pager was published on “poverty and social security”, which

⁴⁹ CRISP, ‘Le problème des déshérités en Belgique.’, 6.

⁵⁰ Later, the Centre would be renamed to honour its first director to Centrum voor Sociaal Beleid Herman Deleeck.

⁵¹ Sara Mels, ‘Een Geschiedenis Met de Armsten. Van Aide à Toute Detresse Tot de ATD Vierde Wereldbeweging (1957-1998).’, 2001, 6–7, http://www.ethesis.net/armsten/armsten_inleiding.htm., idem website CSPHD: [About us | Herman Deleeck Centre for Social Policy | University of Antwerp \(uantwerpen.be\)](#)

⁵² ‘Nationale Aktie voor Bestaanszekerheid’, tijdschrift van het sint-vincentius a paulo genootschap in België, 2/1966, 42.

⁵³ Contributors to the WAE were economist Guido Carrin, Walter De Klerck, Mark Franco, economist Willem Moesen, Omer Roles, Felicia Rongé, economist Jules Theeuwes & sociologist Jan Vranken. Vranken, *Armoede in België, eindred.*

⁵⁴ Vereniging voor economie, ‘De behoeften van de mens en de Belgische economie in de jaren tachtig.’, 1ste en 2de dr. (Brussel: VUB. Centrum voor econometrie en management sciences, 1971), 99.

⁵⁵ Léon Servais, ‘Even voorstellen’, *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Sociale Zekerheid*, 1/1 (1959): 1-2.

defined poverty in affluent societies as a modern problem that was no longer bound to individuals, but was a communal problem created by capitalism.⁵⁶ [Add more on the source for this article: *Journal Esprit*, catholic journal, link with personalism and Mounier] After this piece, no articles appeared on poverty until 1968, when the *Manifest of the Most Disinherited* of the National Action was being commented.⁵⁷ From then onwards, a small number of articles on poverty and related topics occurred, a trend that culminated in the publication of several articles a year on poverty since 1974.⁵⁸ It is no coincidence that the first substantial paper on poverty elaborated on the workings of the National Action. The first academic studies strongly followed the lines laid out by the civil society actors. For sociologist Vranken, it was clear that the renewed interest in poverty among full-time researchers was driven by "quite spectacular cases brought to the fore by the many charitable organisations and social movements", and the side-effect was that poverty rose to the academic agenda through "less scientific lines, compared to Anglo-Saxon countries".⁵⁹

Not only did the civil society actors influence the agenda of academics, new studies made other poverty actors aware of their functioning and vision on poverty. The Society of Saint-Vincent de Paul, for example, was one of the oldest and largest charitable poor relief organisations in Belgium.⁶⁰ In a reflection on the "discovery of individual poverty" in 1972, they concluded that "we do not only need to help the poor, we also need to understand the problems of poverty, and this in relation to the human being as a whole (poverty of culture, freedom, health etc.)."⁶¹ The Vincentians argued that poverty had shifted to not being able to participate in community life, and therefore – as they had done during the social crisis of the 1890s – they added 'new' target groups: the immigrant workers, the elderly and the sick, in addition to their already established target groups of impoverished families, unmarried mothers and homeless people.⁶² The new definitions of poverty led to a range of reflections and debates on the practices in poor relief initiatives, and influenced the way in which the newly defined poor were being helped by civil society actors:

"Whereas before, care for the poor had a perhaps well-meaning paternalistic structure, today's perception of it is completely different. I mean that with the development of the human sciences and the socially critical view of situations, the idea of a more humane

⁵⁶ 'Armoede en sociale zekerheid', *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Sociale Zekerheid*, 6-7/1 (1959): 624-625.

⁵⁷ 'Manifest der meest onterfden', *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Sociale Zekerheid*, 6-7/10 (1968): 1066-1068.

⁵⁸ An overview of the articles of the Journal can be found at [Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Sociale Zekerheid - KU Leuven Bibliotheken](#).

⁵⁹ Vranken Jan, *Armoede in de welvaartsstaat*, p. 17.

⁶⁰ On the Vincentians, see Jan De Maeyer and Paul Wynants, eds., *De Vincentianen in België: 1842-1992* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992).

⁶¹ Dienen, 6/1972: 20.

⁶² "Gezin en samenleving", KADOC, Hoofdraad Vincentianen, box 13.1.1.4, 20/5/1968.

approach to the individual, to the human person, to the poor fellow human being, has grown. The Society [of Saint-Vincent de Paul] has made this new version its own. The current approach, the modern option on relationships is founded on complete equality and equivalence.”⁶³

[Not only inspired by academics but also by personalism, in which the horizontal relationships between people are central]

As the Society aptly noticed, poverty was no longer only being conceived as a structural problem that affected groups of people, nor did academic and lay scholars return to conducting individual case studies. Rather, they started to take neighbourhoods and communities as a new scale on which to study the causes and impact on poverty.⁶⁴ By choosing an intermediate level between the individual approach of private initiatives and the global, structural focus of academic researchers, the understanding of poverty had started to shift from absolute poverty – the lack of basic survival needs such as food, clothing and shelter – to a more relative understanding of poverty.⁶⁵ Relative poverty was defined as the absence of higher-value goods, of which possession seems to have become mandatory in society or the access someone has to the social means that are available for the majority of society, is not guaranteed.⁶⁶ This concept showed that poverty-problems depended on the context one lived in to determine if one was poor or not. Relative poverty helped to deflect the blame from persons experiencing poverty and resulted in an increase of policy makers willing to work on measures to help solving poverty.⁶⁷

Academic researchers started to differentiate their studies to not only envelop statistic and often descriptive studies on poverty, and lay knowledge producers let go of the religious-alarmist tradition of individual amoral behaviour. In his doctoral dissertation in political and social sciences, let by Pierre De Bie, Paul Vercauteren studied the 'subproletariat' as a form of contemporary poverty in Belgium.⁶⁸ Even though he studied and worked at the Catholic University of Leuven, his study was clearly Marxist-inspired. Vercauteren did not quantitate the problems of poverty via statistics, rather, his approach was more theoretical and clearly inspired by international scholars. This could be a reason for his interest in the culture and psychology of the poor.⁶⁹ Indeed, the idea of a 'culture of poverty'

⁶³ Dienen, 15/1974.

⁶⁴ O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 124.

⁶⁵ This shift was subtle, not abrupt. Barrez, 'Voorbij het "goud" van de jaren zestig', 12, 34.

⁶⁶ Vranken Jan, *Armoede in de welvaartsstaat*, p. 189.

⁶⁷ Stéphanie O'Neill, '« Y aura-t-il toujours des pauvres? » : Les transformations des discours sur la pauvreté en période de prospérité', *Labour / Le Travail* 79, no. 1 (2017): 177, <https://doi.org/10.1353/lit.2017.0006>.

⁶⁸ Paul Vercauteren, 'Les Sous-Prolétaires: Essai Sur Une Forme de Paupérisme Contemporain' (Bruxelles, Les Editions Vie Ouvrière, 1970).

⁶⁹ Vercauteren, 89.

was nothing new in 1970, and it stemmed from political sciences, the research tradition of Vercauteren.⁷⁰ In 1959, Oscar Lewis had introduced the idea of a 'culture of poverty' to indicate there were general characteristics to be found in all cases of poverty, whether the people experiencing it lived on the countryside or in the city, whether they lived alone or with a family.⁷¹ The 'culture of poverty'-theory underlined the distinctness of people who grew up in poverty, and amplified the otherness of these people from the rest of society.⁷² As one of the few scientific theories on poverty in the early 1960s, this idea was implemented in Michael Harrington's influential book *The Other America*.⁷³

Vercauteren did not become a leading scholar on poverty in Belgium, but he did inspire another doctoral researcher that did: sociologist Jan Vranken. Vranken started out more ambitious than Vercauteren in his aim to study both the idea of a poverty lines, the culture of poverty and the social stratification of poverty. Like Vercauteren, Vranken relied heavily on international works on poverty, but he reached back to a very different kind of scientific literature, like studies on poverty and language or the psychology of poverty.⁷⁴ The sociologist denounced that almost no scholars tried to synthesise or theorise on the problems of poverty, naming Vercauteren as one of the few exceptions. Indeed, Vranken was very critical of the great willingness of researchers (both lay and academic) to formulate policy recommendations:

"This is very evident in the absence of studies on the structure of the poverty phenomenon, on the relationship between poverty and other social problems and in the almost exclusive focus on those who are poor. But here too, one often gets no further than listing population categories, without looking for common structural characteristics that might give some indication of why precisely *these* population categories."⁷⁵

The structure outlined by Vranken - a listing of population categories and the formulation of policy recommendations - was indeed not only recognizable in Froidure's work and that of the National Action, but also in many academic studies.⁷⁶ With the expansion of the field of poverty researchers, the National Action had deliberately positioned itself as a bridge figure between the scientific world, the political world and the field of action.⁷⁷ Pierre Huvelle, secretary-general of Caritas Catholica Belgium and board-member of National Action, explained the setup for the main publication of the

⁷⁰ O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 119.

⁷¹ O'Connor, 117.

⁷² O'Connor, 'Poverty Knowledge and the History of Poverty Research', 9 of 25.

⁷³ O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 121.

⁷⁴ Vranken, 'Armoede in de Welvaartsstaat. Een Posing Tot Historische En Structurele Plaatsing'.

⁷⁵ Vranken, 21.

⁷⁶ Barrez, 'Voorbij het "goud" van de jaren zestig', 35–36.

⁷⁷ Informatiedossier, 21/12/1966, KBR

organisation as follows: "Seen as a whole, it may confuse the specialists of social action, who are used to seeing the problems in relation to specific categories. In this respect, the "manifest" is in line with current studies on poverty. But the "manifest" wants to lead to action".⁷⁸

Indeed, the emphasis on action was a recurrent theme in the National Action, that called for policy centred research from academics: "Scientific research is not an end in itself but a means aimed at achieving the common good", the organisation stated in its journal in September 1970.⁷⁹ In the same year, they wrote that there should be "a fruitful dialogue between researchers and politicians", so that the implementation of study results in policy could go fluently.⁸⁰ This appeal was not ignored by academic researchers. Many scholars in the 1970s included a section on policy suggestions at the end of their study publications in order to translate their findings into custom-made suggestions for legislators.⁸¹ This policy-driven way of producing science in order to make the studies relevant for legislators was thus not only applied by civil society actors and government agencies' research, but also by academics throughout the western world.⁸² The eagerness of sociologists to contribute to policy even caused Vranken to speak of their "policy hungriness" (*regeergeilheid*) which caused the field's theoretical understanding of poverty to become stuck on a "fairly primal level of scientific research".⁸³

Is knowledge a plural? Different spheres of knowledge

Vranken implicitly pleaded for the academic and activists worlds to be more separated and, indeed, in reality, the recognition between the two worlds was often rigid in both directions. Froidure expressed great disappointment at the end of his life, in 1971, at the non-reception of his works in academic circles:

"It's so obvious; but for these people it's too simple, not "scientific" enough. I like "scientific", I was a professor in Louvain for 25 years, I know what science is, but I don't want to do science for science's sake, I use it for the good of the other."⁸⁴

⁷⁸ Pierre Huvelle, 'NAVB', 1969

⁷⁹ Informatiedossier 25/9/1970

⁸⁰ Informatiedossier 31/8/1970, "Nieuwe perspectieven voor en bejaardenproblematiek".

⁸¹ Amongst others Herman Deleeck, 'Waarheen Met de Sociale Zekerheid?', *Belgisch Tijdschrift Voor Sociale Zekerheid*, no. 1 (1971): 5–30; Vranken, *Armoede in België, eindred.*

⁸² O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 6.

⁸³ Vranken, 'Armoede in de Welvaartsstaat. Een Poging Tot Historische En Structurele Plaatsing', 22.

⁸⁴ Edouard Froidure, « Entretien avec un journaliste nommé Lurkin », 9/1971, ARCA, Papiers Edouard Froidure, Sa lutte contre la pauvreté, box 364-388.

And, in 1973, the National Action organised an 'academic session' that was entirely supported by studies conducted by Aide à Toute Détresse Quart Monde (ATD), a poverty organisation originating from France that specialized in research.

Explicit recognition was lacking, but shifting ideas and concepts were present on both sides of the knowledge-divide. The notion of the 'culture of poverty', for example, was not only applied in academic circles, it was also central in ATD, an organisation that would prove to be very influential on the academic and political world.⁸⁵ ATD grew out of the Emmaus movement and was founded around 1957 by priest Joseph Wresinski in a bidonville of France. Raised himself as a child in an impoverished family, Wresinski found the unequal power relationship between (beneficiaries in) poverty organisations and people in poverty highly problematic.⁸⁶ He radically opposed ad hoc donations that did not bring structural improvements because it placed the poor in a dependent position and cultivated a misplaced sense of 'gratitude'. For ATD, erasing poverty could not be done by handing out food, money and/or provide housing to the poor. The people of the 'Fourth World', as he called people living in poverty, needed to be understood, given a voice and by doing so, society could reintegrate the poor. Wresinski therefore mainly worked on community building - giving the Fourth World a sense of belonging -, and contribute to knowledge on poverty. Researching poverty became a separate pillar of his organisation – the Bureau des Recherches Sociales - around 1960. ATD's research institute was created with the aim of bringing knowledge on poverty from the field to society.⁸⁷ From the start, ATD was working towards the participation of people in poverty in decision-making and assistance, and ATD vehemently opposed the instrumentalization of people in poverty as objects of research. But in the 1970s, its research was still primarily executed by (highly) educated volunteers rather than by members of the Fourth World.⁸⁸

ATD had tried from the start to maintain contacts with the academic environment. The two main bridge figures between ATD (in France and Belgium) and academia between 1960 and 1970 were Jean Labbens (sociologist, Institut Catholique de Lyon) and Christian Debuyst (psychology et criminology, KUL, dean of the faculty of criminology).⁸⁹ Labbens, for example, would publish the first scientific study including the term 'Fourth World' (*Quart Monde*) in 1969.⁹⁰ When ATD gained a foothold in

⁸⁵ Reinecke, 561

⁸⁶ Axelle Brodriez-Dolino, *Wresinski et ATD Quart Monde (1957-2017) : de la connaissance à la reconnaissance* (Hermann, 2018), <https://www-cairn-info.kbr.idm.oclc.org/ce-que-la-misere-nous-donne-a-repenser-avec-joseph--9782705695750-page-111.htm>.

⁸⁷ Jean Tonglet, Entretien sur ATD Quart Monde, 22 April 2022, 2–3.

⁸⁸ Tonglet, Entretien sur ATD Quart Monde.

⁸⁹ Tonglet, 12.

⁹⁰ Mels, 'Een Geschiedenis Met de Armsten. Van Aide à Toute Détresse Tot de ATD Vierde Wereldbeweging (1957-1998).', 21.

Belgium in the late 1960s, the organisation brought with it that focus on knowledge production, which was quickly officialised in the founding of ATD Sciences et Services in Belgium in 1971. Sciences et Services constituted of a team of professionals that aimed to share knowledge on the lives of people living in poverty. As André Modave, one of the founding members of ATD in Belgium, explained in a 1972 documentary:

"I would say that their essential objective is to give back to the population the knowledge that has been stolen from them, they have been robbed from their people, from this population of little people, they have been robbed from their past, they have been robbed from the means to analyse their situation. In short, they have been robbed of their conscience, and we are here to [...] allow them to enter into a dialogue with society."⁹¹

Social activists of ATD wanted to understand the particular culture of the poor and pass this knowledge on to society in order to gain more acceptance. In order to have credibility for their insights, they started working together with academic researchers.⁹² Internationally renowned academics studying poverty such as Peter Townsend were first willing to cooperate with ATD in conferences, but could not agree on the localized notion of poverty that focused on behaviour that ATD invoked, and ignored the underlying, structural forces that induced poverty.⁹³ These academic scientists were studying the structural and statistical side of poverty, not so much the 'culture of the poor' that interested ATD.⁹⁴

Whether because of these straining cooperations with academics, the experiences of other organisations or because of accepting the reality that the methods of the organisations differed from academic methods, ATD started to conceptualize its own relationship towards academic knowledge producers in terms of supplementation rather than cooperation in the 1980s. They formulated different kinds of intelligence that constitute knowledge, and started to differentiate between experienced knowledge and academic knowledge:

"Yes, we don't have the right to speak, of course we have a certain intelligence but we never had *the* intelligence, we also have as much to say as a minister, as those people who had the opportunity to learn a lot at school, we know how to speak because we understand life."⁹⁵

The "Croisement des Savoirs" (crossroads of knowledge), as the theory on the relationship was later called by ATD, stipulated that there are three kinds of knowledge: academic knowledge, knowledge

⁹¹ 'Ceux Qui n'existent Pas', *Emission Concédée Radio Télévision Catholique* (RTB, 1972).

⁹² Reinecke, 565.

⁹³ Reinecke, 565-566

⁹⁴ Reinecke, 565.

⁹⁵ 'Ceux Qui n'existent Pas'.

through activism and knowledge through experience.⁹⁶ Because all three are needed to fully understand poverty, both academic researchers, activists and people experiencing poverty had to come together in order to develop a true understanding of poverty and make meaningful policy recommendations.

In order to facilitate this dialogue, ATD organized Universities of the People, where experiences of people living in poverty were held in the same regard as research done by professional scientists. A number of Belgian universities partnered with ATD to make this happen.⁹⁷ Collaboration with universities thus remained crucial for ATD, but instead of only pursuing collaboration, it aimed at creating its own space in the knowledge production with a supplementing kind of knowledge. Another implication of the *Croisement des Savoirs* was that civil society researchers no longer needed to live up to scientific standards regarding methodology. In this view, the difference between expertise and scientific research became sharper.

This opposition between the structural view on poverty suggested by academics, and the cultural view used by ATD can, according to Reinecke, be partly brought back to the opposition between a “left-wing Catholic milieu holding on to a universal vision of misery that necessitated social work wherever it occurred – and a critical sociology developing in constant dialogue with national welfare state politics”.⁹⁸ This idea, however, sketches to rigid a view. For one, it downplays the projects of collaboration that existed between civil society researchers and their academic counterparts. Secondly, it does not consider the strong catholic influence on university research and welfare state politics. Lastly, focusing on the oppositions between academic and lay researchers disregards the informal and often personal stories that nuance a stark contrast between these two worlds of research. Evidence can be found in the number of professional researchers that, after hours, volunteered in civil society organisations like ATD.

Conclusion

In 1981, the Brussels organisation Comité Général d’Action des Marolles published a book on the merits of grassroots communities for the fight against poverty. The book was called *La face cachée: pauvreté, politique sociale, action urbaine* (The hidden face: poverty, social politics and urban action),

⁹⁶ Tonglet, Entretien sur ATD Quart Monde, 14.

⁹⁷ ‘On a toujours cherché à avoir des liens avec l’université. Donc, par exemple, pour Quart Monde Université, les deux partenaires principaux, c’étaient l’Université de Tours (France) et l’UCL (Belgique) avec la Faculté Ouverte de Politique et Economiques Sociales, qui ont été très partie prenante de ce projet. Pierre Fontaine de la KUL-UCL, Jacques Ferret de faculté de Namur et l’université de Liège. Des gens très divers’ Tonglet, 13.

⁹⁸ Reinecke, 566.

and was the result of a partnership with university researchers. In the book, they reflected on their collaboration as follows:

"The book we are about to read is the result of a marriage generally considered impossible: that of university research, in this case that of the CSUR (*Centre de Sociologie Urbaine et Rurale de l'Université Catholique de Louvain*), and the experience of a committee of residents active in a working-class district of Brussels: the *Comité Général d'Action des Marolles*".⁹⁹

By studying both the researches of civil society actors and of academic scholars, we can understand why these actors thought of their cooperation as a rareness. Indeed, from the nineteen seventies onwards, the spheres of academic and activists researchers had mostly become separated.

This had not always been the case. Throughout the postwar period, civil society actors have produced activist knowledge aimed at changing policy on poverty. The first studies of these actors, led by Edouard Froidure, aimed at bringing together the dispersed field of caregiving by framing poverty as a distinct social reality.¹⁰⁰ In doing so, Froidure and the National Action for Vital Security managed to gain political power and generate public and academic awareness for issues of poverty in the nineteen fifties and sixties. Subsequently, social and economic researchers started to contribute to poverty knowledge as well. Because poverty was now considered to envelop a large number of excluded groups, the estimations of people living in poverty were high. Scholars became thus mainly interested in gathering information on a group-level, rather than studying individual cases, and defined the structural causes of poverty alongside policy recommendations to adept social structures.

In the 1970s, poverty scholars continued to emphasise the structural causes of poverty, but they also acknowledged it as a multidimensional problem. It was at the same time personal, cultural, structural and relative to the society in which it occurred. This holistic way of approaching poverty found connection in both academic thinking and the majority of poverty initiatives.¹⁰¹ With the reformulating of poverty during the sixties, poverty had shifted from a problem of unemployment towards a 'new poverty', which was a self-perpetuating culture that trapped generation after generation.¹⁰² Thus, they rebutted the idea that poverty could be solved. This was particularly problematic for civil society actors that depended on the public's donations and legislators' vigour to end poverty, but they, too, found a way to adapt to this new notion of poverty.

⁹⁹ Daniel Bodson and Jean-Pierre Hiernaux, *La face cachée: pauvreté, politique sociale, action urbaine* (Bruxelles: Vie ouvrière, 1981), 7.

¹⁰⁰ Zamora Vargas, 'How Poverty Became a Violation of Human Rights'.

¹⁰¹ Barrez, "Voorbij het 'goud' van de jaren zestig", p. 37.

¹⁰² Aksamit, 'Absolutely Sort of Normal', XV.

According to the Belgian Society of Saint-Vincent de Paul, this new poverty was caused by affluency itself, and this needed to be fought differently than the 'old poverty'.¹⁰³ Included in these new ideas on poverty was the diverse causes it now could have, such as the social milieu in which someone was brought up. ATD Quart Monde, on its part, started to implement the idea of a 'culture of poverty', a concept that had been around since 1959 in academic circles and that focused on the specific conditions of people living in poverty. For ATD, the notion of a distinct 'culture' implied that people who did not experience it, could not fully understand poverty. Therefore, they introduced the *croisement des savoirs*. Through it, ATD reclaimed a particular kind of expertise: some kinds of knowledge cannot be pursued in academic research, and thus remained vital partners in the quest for knowledge, even in an abundance of academic research.

However, the separation of academic and activist research was not as stark as they sometimes believed it to be. Academics, too, continued to be interested in the consequences of poverty on human behaviour. These academics sought out personal relationships with civil society actors. Furthermore, as is shown in the quote at the beginning of the conclusion, some project-bound cooperations between academics and activists proved to be very fruitful. [develop further]

In this article, we only touched upon the subject of ideology, and the importance of Catholicism in both the studies of academics and activists. In the late 1950s, Froidure's Catholic background proved to be an asset to gain expert status. But later on, lay poverty researchers started to conceal their religious inspiration or their political outlook because of the premise that science must be value-free, a tendency that still exists until today.¹⁰⁴ For the same reasons, activism and policy-driven research in academic circles became frowned upon. Nevertheless, ideology and activism remained at the core of both lay and professional research. [develop further]

¹⁰³ Nicole Bastin, "Kommentaar op het geestelijk tema", *Dienen* n°12, 1973: p. 20.

¹⁰⁴ O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 6.