

CEGESOMA - State Archives

NEWSLETTER

No 113 - May 2026



NEWS

THANK YOU, ALEXANDRE, FOR YOUR COMMITMENT

A volunteer at CegeSoma since March 2020, Alexandre Stroïnovsky was one of the driving forces behind the Resistance in Belgium project. Appreciated for his thoroughness, ingenuity, enthusiasm, and unmatched sense of humor, he will leave an indelible mark on the hearts of those who knew him.

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INTERVIEW WITH ALANA CASTRO DE AZEVEDO

A researcher with the CONCILIARE project, Alana Castro de Azevedo highlights the importance of this interdisciplinary research, which underscores the fact that European colonialism is not merely a thing of the past, but still shapes and influences our societies in many ways.

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'WEERAL WO2?!'

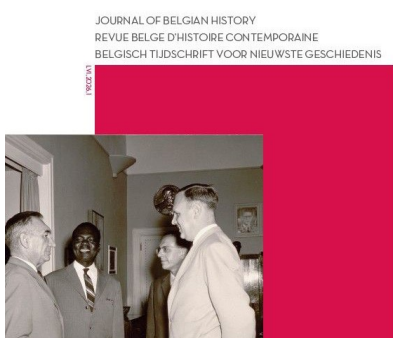
The bi-monthly podcast series Weeral WO2?!, created by Nico Wouters and Koen Aerts, launched in April 2026, enjoys great popularity and generates widespread interest. This is particularly true of the episodes dedicated to the famous 20th convoy.

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PUBLICATION

JOURNAL OF BELGIAN HISTORY (2026/1)

Literature, occupation, decolonization, and artificial intelligence feature in the first issue of 2026. A publication at the intersection of source analysis, methodological innovation, and major issues of memory.

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Our volunteer colleague and friend Alexandre Stroïnovsky left us



Wednesday, 13 May 2026, is a dark day for CegeSoma. On that day, Alexandre Stroïnovsky lost the battle he was fighting for several months against illness. A volunteer at CegeSoma since March 2020, he was one of the driving forces behind the Resistance in Belgium project. Beloved by all for his diligence, ingenuity, enthusiasm, and unmatched sense of humor, he will leave his mark on the hearts of everyone who knew him.



Alexandre discovered CegeSoma in January 2020 through our now-retired colleague Alain Colignon during the filming of the documentary "Les enfants de la collaboration," for which he had been asked to share his family's history. Two months later, on March 19, 2020, he sent me an email stating his desire to join CegeSoma's team of volunteers. To support his request, he described himself as an active retiree, passionate about history, and having recently published a biography of the American automobile manufacturer Preston Tucker. Automobiles were one of his many other passions...

In the brief biographical note he sent to CegeSoma when we asked him to introduce himself on our website, he noted that he was an industrial engineer from Mons and had had a fairly diverse professional career. He had indeed worked in international trade as well as for INTAS (an agency of the European Commission), where he served as a liaison between the IT department and scientific experts in the context of developing research projects. Retired for five years, he wished to make his IT expertise available to CegeSoma.



Over the five-plus years he worked for CegeSoma—until November 2025—he contributed far more than just his IT expertise to our institution! With very few exceptions, he was present every Monday to enter data into Excel files regarding the records of World War II resistance fighters: first those of members of the small L100 movement, then intelligence and action agents, resistance members in the underground press, civilian resistance members, and finally, since November 2024, armed resistance fighters.

seriousness, he also had a knack for lifting the team's spirits on Mondays with his colorful anecdotes and hilarious jokes. He frequently participated in the scientific activities organized by CegeSoma. Moreover, he never missed any of the events organized for volunteers. He often told me how happy he was to be working at CegeSoma. Last December, he joined us again to visit the exhibition on Belgium's State Railways (SNCB) during World War II. His phone rang discreetly every three minutes... and for good reason: his many friends hadn't forgotten it was his birthday!

One thing is certain: he will be sorely missed by everyone, as evidenced by the various spontaneous reactions following his departure, which are compiled below:

While he approached his work with the utmost



« Je viens d'apprendre, ce soir, par notre ami commun, qu'Alexandre nous a quitté mercredi soir. Il avait à nouveau été hospitalisé (...). Je suis tellement désolée, je comptais fermement lui rendre visite cette semaine. »

« Je m'en veux aussi de m'être trop facilement rassuré. (...). Bien sombre dimanche, en tout cas. »

« Quelle triste nouvelle ! Depuis notre visite à Train World en décembre, je

savais évidemment que son état n'était pas bon, mais j'espérais une amélioration. »

« Quelle bien triste nouvelle ... J'avais moi aussi le secret espoir qu'Alexandre allait prendre le dessus ... et que nous le reverrions ... Toutes les photos que j'ai pu retrouver d'Alexandre depuis mars 2020 (...) témoignent de sa joie de vivre, de son caractère espiègle mais tellement bienveillant et de son implication dans votre équipe (j'ai presque envie de dire famille) de bénévoles. Voilà, je voulais encore juste vous dire qu'il allait aussi, comme à vous, beaucoup me manquer et que j'étais de tout cœur avec vous et avec les siens. »



« Je l'ai eu plusieurs fois [au téléphone] quand il était hospitalisé mais je n'ai pas su aller le voir ... je n'imaginai pas que cela aurait été si vite... (...). Oui il m'a tellement apporté (...) des fous rires, un humour décapant parfois. »

"Echt heel droevig nieuws! Zo'n geweldige, grappige man en zo'n leuke

collega in het ploegje van de maandag"

« C'était un personnage unique et attachant, je me rappellerai ses anecdotes hautes en couleurs, sa bonne humeur et ses traits d'esprit. Je suis très heureuse d'avoir pu croiser son chemin. »

« Au-delà de la peine causée par cette nouvelle, je suis persuadé qu'Alexandre continuera à nous accompagner tant que sa mémoire restera dans nos cœurs. »

Goodbye, dear Alexandre, and thank you for everything.

Fabrice

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Interview with Alana Castro de Azevedo, researcher within the CONCILIARE project



The European project CONCILIARE (Confidently Changing Colonial Heritage), which focuses on the legacies of the colonial past, was launched in March 2024. Bringing together partners from six countries (Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal, Italy, Finland, and Croatia), the project includes social psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, historians, as well as associations such as ICOM Belgique-Wallonie/Bruxelles and Afropean Project. Within this project, Chantal Kesteloot (CegeSoma/State Archives of Belgium) coordinated WP2, focused on public spaces in Belgium, Italy, and Portugal, while the postdoctoral researcher Alana Castro de Azevedo worked on the identification of colonial heritage in Brussels, Antwerp, and Mons. Following the identification of this heritage, a number of case studies were conducted to examine different forms of contestation in depth.

As Alana's time on the project is coming to an end, we wanted to ask her a few questions.

Alana, in your previous research you had already worked on controversies related to public space. In what ways has the research you conducted within the CONCILIARE project changed your perspective on these controversies?

In my previous research, I focused on protests against the construction of new memorials in public space. Because these protests were unfolding while I was doing my research, most of my work consisted of interviewing both supporters and opponents of these memorial projects. The research I conducted within CONCILIARE was quite different, because many of the monuments, toponyms, and buildings we identified had been created more than a century ago. This meant that, in order to understand the context in which they were created, I had to engage with archival research, which was quite a challenge at first for someone trained as an anthropologist and unfamiliar with the Belgian context. What really changed my perspective was realizing how rich the archives are. They showed that some of these monuments and street names were already contested when they were created (although not for the same reasons they are today), and that public space was constantly transformed over time: streets were renamed, buildings destroyed or repurposed, monuments relocated or modified, and the meanings attached to them changed. Working with these materials changed the way I do research, because it made me realize the importance of making the wider public aware that the functions and meanings attached to colonial monuments and toponyms are never fixed. Bringing this historical perspective into contemporary debates on colonial heritage is important, I think, because it shows that struggles over public memory and demands for change have always existed.

Within the CONCILIARE project, research on public space focused on three different countries (Belgium, Italy, and Portugal). What differences and similarities were you able to observe?

Each of these three countries has a distinct colonial past, and each promotes a different narrative about that past in order to sustain an idealized representation of the nation. In Portugal and Italy, for example, the colonial enterprise is often portrayed as “softer” than that of other former colonial powers. In Belgium, although the atrocities committed under Leopold II’s rule in the Congo Free State are well documented, there is still considerable resistance to fully acknowledging the violence of the colonial regime. The moment when colonial references started to be contested also differs from one country to another. In Belgium, contestation emerged from the early 2000s onwards, while in Italy colonial references only started to be contested in the late 2010s. In Portugal, contestation is more visible than in Italy, but positive narratives about Portugal’s “Age of Discoveries” remain deeply ingrained in Portuguese society. The inauguration of the statue of Padre António Vieira in Lisbon as recently as 2017, as well as the proposal to create a “Museum of the Discoveries” in 2020, illustrate these tensions particularly well. In terms of similarities, the contestation of references to colonialism in public space has been driven, in all three countries, by civil society. The strategies used to challenge colonial symbols are also similar, as activists have mainly organized demonstrations, launched petitions, physically intervened on contested traces, or created (ephemeral) artistic interventions. The arguments used to defend these symbols likewise tend to be similar across the three countries, with critics of these protests often presenting them as attacks on national heritage and identity or as attempts to erase history.

Why do you consider such a project important, and why?

CONCILIARE is important because it shows that European colonialism is not just a matter of the past, but something that continues to shape and influence our societies in many different ways. The project highlights how colonial legacies remain embedded in multiple aspects of everyday life – from textbooks and museum exhibitions to public commemorations, cultural practices, and even food consumption. Another aspect that makes the project particularly interesting, in my opinion, is its interdisciplinary approach. By bringing together perspectives from history, social psychology, anthropology, sociology, and cultural geography, CONCILIARE makes it possible to understand these issues in a much more comprehensive way. All these approaches complement one another and show that no single discipline could fully grasp how present and complex these colonial legacies still are today.

As a Brazilian living in the Netherlands, this work gave you the opportunity to discover Belgium. What did you learn about Belgian society over the course of these eighteen months? What surprised you the most?

I was really excited to work in Belgium, because discussions about the colonality of public space and heritage seem to be much more present here than in the Netherlands, where I currently live. From abroad, it really seemed

that Belgium was taking concrete steps to confront and engage with its colonial legacies, and that it could somehow serve as an example for other European countries. It sounds a bit naïve now (and it certainly was), but I had high expectations, especially because of all the parliamentary commissions, working groups, reports, and action plans launched on the subject in recent years. But when I arrived here, I realized that the colonial past is still an extremely sensitive issue, that there is a great deal of social resistance around these questions, and that the implementation of concrete policies is a much slower and more contested process than it may appear from the outside.

Thank you, Alana Castro de Azevedo, for these two fruitful years of collaboration! We wish you all the best in your future projects.

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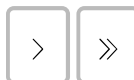
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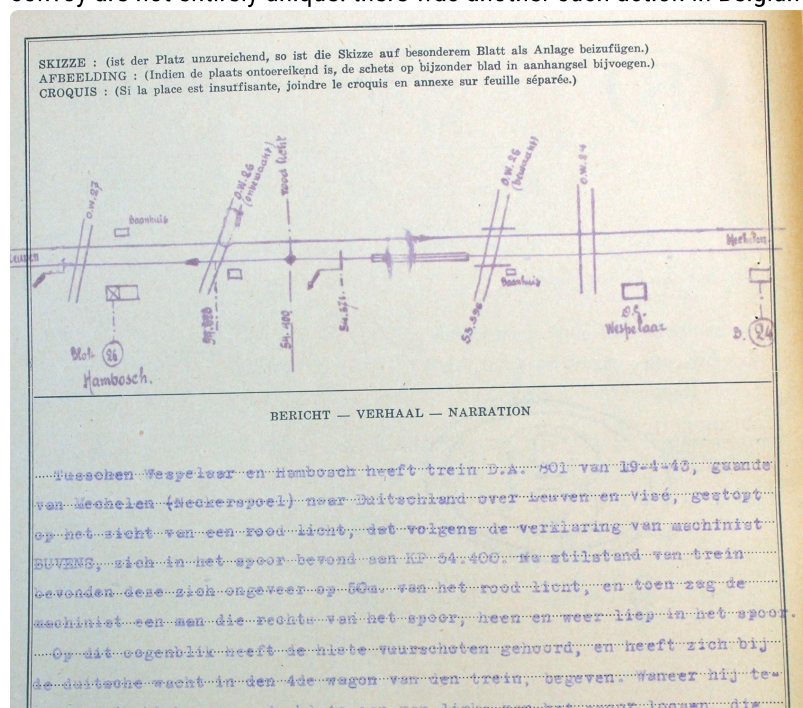
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Lots of Reactions to the New Podcast Series “Weeral WO2?!”



The biweekly podcast series **Weeral WO2?!** by Nico Wouters and Koen Aerts, launched in April 2026, is attracting a large audience and generating a lot of feedback. This is certainly true for **the episodes about the famous 20th convoy**, which explore the tension between history and memory. In doing so, they also reveal some new facts about this history. For instance, the place where the train came to a halt is not the current memorial site with a monument in the municipality of Boortmeerbeek, but is actually four kilometers further away in the municipality of Haacht. It also turns out that not one but two resistance attacks were carried out on the same train. The second, forgotten attack took place at the Korbeek-Lo station, near Leuven. Furthermore, these resistance actions on the 20th convoy are not entirely unique: there was another such action in Belgium and one in the Ardèche region of France.



These episodes led to [an article in Het Laatste Nieuws](#), interviews with Nico Wouters on [Radio 2](#) and [Brabant regional television](#), [a feature on the VRT news site](#), and [articles by Karlien Beckers in De Standaard](#) and [by Vincent Rocour in La Libre Belgique](#).

[In response, survivor and witness Simon Gronowski also wrote an opinion piece](#). Finally, [a long article appeared in Knack, in which Nico Wouters and Koen Aerts went on a reconnaissance mission on-site in Haacht](#), and another “right of reply” from Simon Gronowski in the

newspaper “Het Laatste Nieuws” on May 11.

The episode on “**Should 8 May become a public holiday?**” was [broadcast in full on VRT Radio 1 and also prompted a response from Ruud Martens, with additional background information on the 8 May celebrations in the city of Antwerp.](#)

High listening figures and numerous responses prove that it remains important to bring historical research to a wider audience. Before the summer holiday break, episodes will follow in May and June **featuring author Tom Lanoye discussing his war novel *De Draaischijf*, the story of Narcisse Rulot, the head of the NMBS during the war**, and questions such as “**Was the repression truly anti-Flemish?**” and “**Was World War II won by the Soviet Union?**”

Weeral WO2?! is available on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, or directly via the website www.weeralwo2.be (feedback welcome at weeralwo2@gmail.com). Weeral WO2?! is a podcast produced in collaboration with the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy (Ghent University), with support from Archiefpunt, CegeSoma, and FARO. Flemish Support Center for Cultural Heritage.

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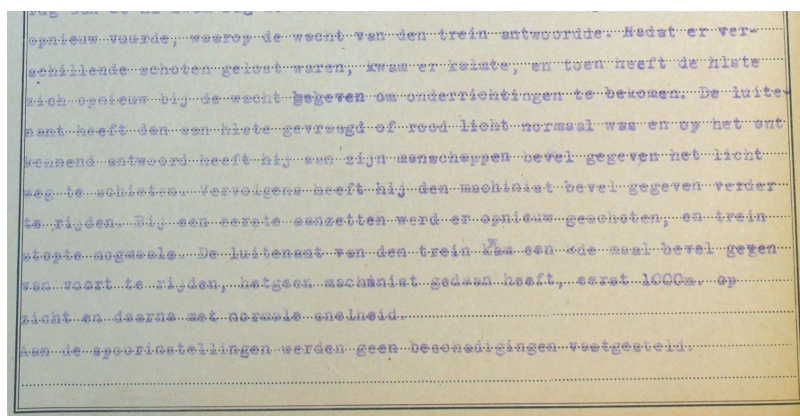
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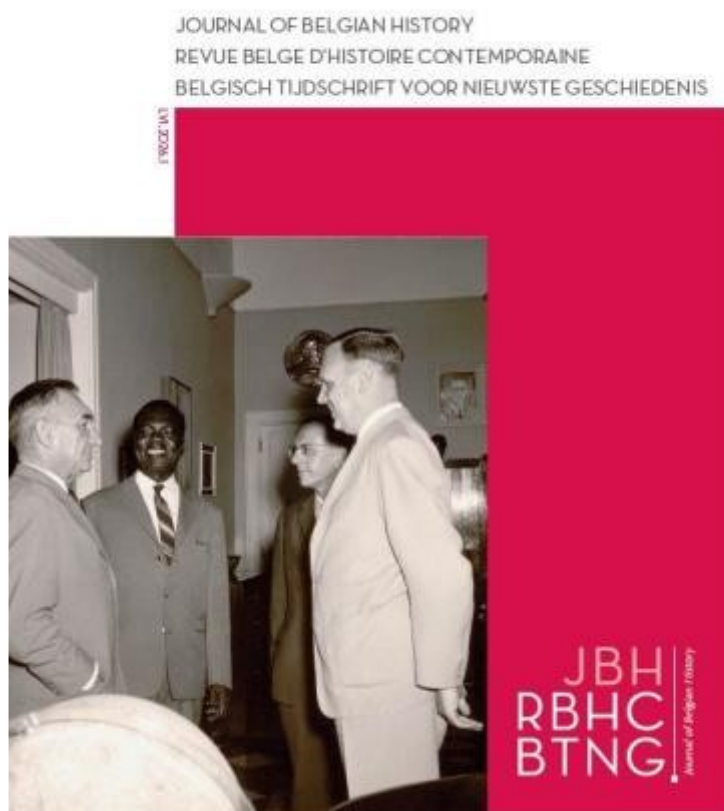




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This issue opens with three articles. **Margaux Van Uytvanck** (postdoctoral researcher at ULB and project coordinator at the NFWO) describes Marcel Broodthaers' poetic journey to visual art. The next article by **Pierre-Alexis du Bus de Warnaffe** (Ph.D. candidate at the European University Institute in Florence) explores the history of administrative control and identification techniques in Belgium, with a particular focus on the role of municipalities regarding the Personal-Ausweis introduced by the German occupiers in "Greater Brussels" during World War I. Finally, **Gertjan Desmet** (archivist at CegeSoma-State Archives) presents his impressive archival analysis on the authenticity of the typescript of Patrice Lumumba's famous speech on June 30, 1960.

Alongside these contributions, this issue also features a dossier on the use of artificial intelligence in historical and archival research, with position papers by **Xavier Gillard** (FED-tWIN researcher at the State Archives and UCLouvain), **Frédéric Clavert** (researcher at the Luxembourg Centre for Contemporary and Digital History – C²DH), and **Caroline Muller** (researcher at the University of Rennes 2).

A concise and illuminating publication at the intersection of source analysis, methodological innovation, and the major challenges facing the culture of remembrance, concluding with fourteen abstracts of doctoral dissertations

recently defended at Belgian universities.

This issue is available for 15.00 euros (excluding shipping costs) and can be ordered from CegeSoma, Aviation Square 29 – 1070 Brussels, +32 2/556 92 11 - cegesoma@arch.be.

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