Heritagization and Festive Culture: Christmas, Foodways and Women's Magazines

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Abstract

This paper investigates the discursive construction of typical foodways in relation to Christmas in Flanders after World War II. I explore if Christmas celebrations translated into typical foodways and if so, by whom, when and why the translation took place. Building on the notion of heritagization, the analysis shows that Christmas was interpreted in light of convivial family life and although food played a role in bringing together the family around the Christmas table, the menu did not speak of typical dishes. The analysis deals with mentality history, and its cultural expression through food and foodways, providing an understanding of how people used food to forge a sense of community.

Keywords

Heritagization, typicality, festive culture, Christmas, women's magazines

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Introduction

Food scholars have only occasionally developed research questions dealing with the relationship between festive culture and foodways. On the one hand, they focus on medieval or renaissance court culture, investigating the dishes served at royal, princely and papal banquets or the social networks performed at the courtly table.¹ On the other hand, they explore the relationship between religious or secular festivities and foodways during the 19th and 20th centuries, emphasizing family celebrations and interpreting these in terms of typical dishes, preparations or ingredients.²

This paper builds on the latter approach by exploring the relationship between festive culture and foodways, yet it also goes beyond it by questioning this so-called relationship. Although existing research provides valuable insights, it tends to generalize empirical findings without exploring the geographical, chronological or ideological nuances of festive

* All translations from Dutch to English are mine.

¹ Ken Albala, *The Banquet. Dining in the Great Courts of Late Renaissance Europe* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Daniëlle De Vooght, *The King Invites. Performing Power at a Courtly Table (Belgium, 1831-1909)* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2011); Alban Gautier & Allen J. Grieco, 'Food and Drink in Medieval and Renaissance Europe: An Overview of the Past Decade (2001-2012)', *Food & History* 10 (2012) 80-82.

² Dorothy Duncan, *Feasting and Fasting. Canada's Heritage Celebrations* (Ontario: Dundurn, 2010); Martin Franc, 'Merry and Abundant: Celebrating Christmas in the Czech Lands in the 1950s and 1960s', *Food & History* 4 (2006) 237-252; Darra Goldstein & Kathrin Merkle, *Culinary Cultures of Europe. Identity, Diversity and Dialogue* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2005); Helen M. Leach & Raelene Inglis, 'The Archaeology of Christmas Cakes', *Food & Foodways* 11 (2003) 141-166; Patricia Lysaght (ed.), *Food and Celebration: From Fasting to Feasting* (Ljubljana: ZRC, 2002); Susan Mazur-Stommen, 'Christmas Foodways and Ritual in Northern Germany: Distinctions East and West of the Former Border', *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 21 (2003) 27-29.

food culture. Consequently, it has developed a unilateral understanding of the relationship between festive culture and foodways in terms of typicality. I challenge the generalization by investigating the discursive construction of typical foodways in relation to Christmas in Flanders after World War II. Historically, Catholic celebrations characterized Flemish (and Belgian) festive culture, but the post-war secularization of society impacted their frequency and number in favor of non-Catholic feasts like Labor Day (a holiday acquired by the socialist labor movement) or the Islamic *Id al-Fitr* (Sugar Feast). By the beginning of the 21st century, the Catholic festive calendar had roughly stripped down to Easter and Christmas, while it saw the meaning of these holidays secularized and even commercialized.³

Food plays an important role on December 24th and 25th in post-war Flanders,⁴ and the question I ask is if the so-called Christmas table translated into the construction of typical foodways. Did it require certain dishes, preparations or ingredients to turn the Christmas meal into a typical Christmas dinner? If so, by whom, when and why did the translation take place? And did the secularization and thus the ideological diversification of society result in conflicting translations? What did the Christmas table look like in a Catholic home compared to, say, a socialist one? I will answer these questions through the lens of heritagization as theoretical framework and by means of a mixed methods approach of women's magazines. The following paragraphs will first deal with heritagization, justify why women's magazines are valuable for heritagization research and explain the paper's mixed use of quantitative predicate analysis and qualitative close reading.

³ Peter Scholliers, *Food Culture in Belgium* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2008) ch. 6.

⁴ Scholliers, *Food Culture in Belgium*, ch. 6.

Setting the stage

Heritagization as theoretical framework allows for a thorough understanding of heritage initiatives in relation to material and/or immaterial food culture. It states that “heritage does not exist in itself, it surfaces from a process of appropriation - of heritagization - by a certain group, a process that gives new meaning to certain objects”.⁵ Hence, heritagization is a form of gastrolinguistics, that is the classification of dishes, preparations or ingredients through ideologically colored language.⁶ Important to point out is that heritagization is not teleological with a defined start and end point, but an amalgam of fragmented and even conflicting meaning-making initiatives by a multiplicity of interested actors with their own socio-economic and ideological framework. The meaning-making, in turn, relies on the use of a dedicated vocabulary that can either construct historical anchorage with the use of denominations such as authenticity, tradition and grandmother’s cooking, or place-bound anchorage with the use of geographical and *terroir*-related indications.⁷ Typicality, in addition, can refer to either historical or geographical anchorage.⁸ The use of heritagization as theoretical framework builds on the research question I address in this paper; with its

⁵ Loïc Bienassis, ‘Quelle carte pour quel territoire? Impossibles et nécessaires: les inventaires du patrimoine alimentaire’, *Food & History* 9 (2011) 129.

⁶ Robin Tolmach Lakoff, ‘Identity à la Carte: You Are What You Eat’, in: Anna de Fina, Deborah Schiffrin and Michael Bamberg (eds.), *Discourse and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 142-165; Massimo Montanari, *Food is Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006) 35-41, 55-57, 133; Nathalie Parys, ‘Cooking Up a Culinary Identity for Belgium. Gastrolinguistics in Two Belgian Cookbooks (19th Century)’, *Appetite* 71 (2013) 218-231.

⁷ Loïc Bienassis, ‘Les chemins du patrimoine: de Notre-Dame au Camembert’, in: Antonella Campanini, Peter Scholliers and Jean-Pierre Williot (eds.), *Manger en Europe: patrimoines, échanges, identités* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2011) 45-91.

⁸ Giovanni Ceccarelli, Alberto Grandi & Stefano Magagnoli, ‘The “Taste” of Typicality’, *Food & History* 8 (2010) 45-76; Anneke Geyzen, ‘Food Studies and the Heritage Turn: A Conceptual Repertoire’, *Food & History* 12 (2014) 91.

focus on language, actors and frameworks, it will enable me to investigate the discursive construction of typical foodways in relation to Christmas in post-war Flanders, who the actors were, when the construction took place and why it did.

Recent research exemplifies the variety of sources for heritagization research; a non-exhaustive list includes the more mainstream material, such as cookbooks, gastronomic exhibitions and culinary maps, but it also mentions rather unconventional documents like travel guides, encyclopedias and dictionaries. These sources – when dealing with heritage concepts – are inventories of dishes, preparations or ingredients a given community appropriates as its heritage.⁹ I argue popular media in general and women's magazines in particular should be added to the list, as they have proved rewarding for research questions dealing with the heritagization of material and/or immaterial food culture.¹⁰ They enable scholars to study “food as a cultural expression”¹¹ and to investigate translations of a broader societal context into food.

Women's magazines provide insights into processes of meaning-making that are colored by their socio-economic and ideological interpretation of social, economic and political events. Furthermore, they and their translations of a broader societal context rely on the collectivity

⁹ Antonella Campanini, 'De l'hymne au territoire à l'apologie des terroirs. Une brève histoire des inventaires culinaires italiens depuis l'Unification (1861)', *Food & History* 9 (2011) 153-172.

¹⁰ Sandrine Barrey and Geneviève Teil, 'Faire la preuve de l'authenticité du patrimoine alimentaire. Le cas des vins de terroir', *Anthropology of Food* 8 (2011) <<http://aof.revues.org/6783>> [accessed 14 June 2012]; Selina Ching Chan, 'Food, Memories, and Identities in Hong Kong', *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 17 (2010) 204-227; Helen Leach, *The Pavlova Story. A Slice of New Zealand's Culinary History* (Otago: Otago University Press, 2009) 11-25.

¹¹ Jeffrey M. Pilcher, 'Cultural Histories of Food', in: Jeffrey M. Pilcher (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Food History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) 41.

of the editorial board and the implied audience,¹² while they appear periodically and over a longer period of time. The more conventional sources transcribe societal trends and events into food as well, but they appear only once or on an irregular basis, rendering women's magazines more suited to investigate continuity and change in a social, economic and political context from a long-term perspective.¹³

As for this paper's research question, women's magazines enable the analysis of heritagization as a meaning-making process. In contrast to their one-off or irregular counterparts that only provide heritagization snapshots, they allow a long-term contextualization and investigation of appropriation processes of material and/or immaterial food culture. Furthermore, they permit the comparison of different socio-economic and ideological backgrounds in relation to heritagization. Women's magazines thus provide a valuable source to study the discursive construction of typical foodways in relation to Christmas in Flanders after World War II and to explore by whom, when and why the relationship between festive culture and foodways was constructed in terms of typicality.

The analysis include two women's magazines characterized by diverging socio-economic and ideological frameworks in Flanders between 1945 and 2000. First, I used the monthly *De Boerin/Bij de Haard/Eigen Aard*, published by the Belgian Farmer Women's Association. The magazine initially wrote for an agrarian-only audience, but gradually changed focus due to

¹² Sonia Livingstone, 'Audience Research at the Crossroads. The 'Implied Audience' in Media and Cultural Theory', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 1 (1998) 193-217.

¹³ David Gauntlett, *Media, Gender and Identity. An Introduction* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006); Anna Gough-Yates, *Understanding Women's Magazines: Publishing, Markets and Readerships* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006); Tim Holmes, 'Mapping the Magazine. An Introduction', *Journalism Studies* 8 (2007) 510-514; Mehita Iqani, *Consumer Culture and the Media. Magazines in the Public Eye* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012); Ellen McCracken, *Decoding Women's Magazines. From Mademoiselle to Ms.* (London: MacMillan, 1993)

Flanders' changing employment structure. The primary sector lost its primordial position to the advantage of the industrial and service sectors that employed a growing number of wage earners. Furthermore, *De Boerin/Bij de Haard/Eigen Aard* was a Catholic magazine encapsulated by the Christian-democratic party. The party often used the magazine to promote its political agenda and to recruit its electorate. The monthly undoubtedly contributed to the quasi-permanent political dominance of the Christian-democratic party in post-war Flanders.¹⁴

Second, I used the monthly *De Stem der Vrouw*, published by the Socialist Women's Organization and addressing an implied audience of socialist working-class (and wage-earning) women. With the changing employment structure in post-war Flanders, women progressively participated in the labor market; *De Stem der Vrouw* very much encouraged this evolution and correspondingly advocated women's emancipation. Besides, the magazine's content was strongly influenced by the socialist party that used it in its quest to breach the Christian-democratic dominance of the political scape. Accordingly, *De Stem der Vrouw* emphasized the advantages of the socialist agenda that emancipated women, while it contrasted this idea to the Christian-democratic agenda that supported the idea of the housewife.¹⁵

¹⁴ Sofie De Caigny, *Bouwen aan een nieuwe thuis. Wooncultuur in Vlaanderen tijdens het interbellum* (Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 2010) 34-36; Anneke Geyzen, 'Popular Discourse on Nutrition, Health and Indulgence in Flanders, 1945-1960', *Appetite* 45 (2011) 279-280; Leen Van Molle, *Ieder voor allen. De Belgische Boerenbond 1890-1990* (Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 1990).

¹⁵ Denise De Weerd, 'Een beter leven voor onze kinderen', in: Denise De Weerd (ed.), *De dochters van Marianne. 75 jaar SVV* (Antwerp: Hadewijch, 1997) 27-28; Peter Scholliers, "'Vreugde heerst aan de dis.'" Een essay over de huisvrouw en de voeding van arbeiders in de politieke economie van België (1840-1940)', *Voeden en Opvoeden. Jaarboek voor Vrouwengeschiedenis* 19 (1999) 85.

I subjected the recipe pages of both magazines to a mixed methods approach,¹⁶ combining quantitative predicate analysis and qualitative close reading. Predicate analysis is a form of discourse analysis that studies “language practices in texts”¹⁷ and concentrates on the use of adjectives in relation to nouns. It provides an understanding of how recipes are discursively classified by their makers and as such fits the framework of gastrolinguistics. In order to get a grasp on the 4,819 recipes that appeared in the magazines between 1945 and 2000, I subjected them to a thematic coding based on their predicate. I developed a separate code for festive menus (as stated in the title of the recipe section) and a sub-code for their predicate (as mentioned in the recipe’s name). For example: in December 1985, the Catholic magazine published a Christmas menu containing, among others, “roasted rabbit with tomato sauce” and “eggs the Ostend way with a fresh salad”.¹⁸ Based on the title of the recipe section, I first coded the recipes as festive and based on the recipe names, I then sub-coded the rabbit recipe as referring to a cooking method (“roasted”) and the eggs recipe as referring to heritagization (“Ostend”), with Ostend being a coastal city in Flanders and geographical indications being a linguistic category of heritagization initiatives. The coding took place in different phases to eliminate errors and rethink codes if necessary, and once completed allowed me to quickly yet thoroughly identify heritagization predicates and their frequency. Additionally, in order to interpret and explain the quantitative data, I subjected the women’s magazines to close reading, which is a layered reading technique analyzing language use - and in this paper’s case heritagization predicates - in relation to the

¹⁶ Abbas Tashakkori and Charles Teddlie (eds.), *SAGE Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social & Behavioral Research* (Thousand Oaks & London & New Delhi & Singapore: SAGE, 2010).

¹⁷ Jennifer Milliken, ‘The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods’, *European Journal of International Relations* 5 (1999) 231.

¹⁸ *Bij de Haard*, December 1985, 32-33.

text, the medium's framework and the broader social, economic and political context.¹⁹ It enabled me to bring the results from the predicate analysis to a next level and substantiate the rough interpretative framework the quantification set out. In the next paragraphs, I will present the research results from this mixed methods approach, after describing the social, economic and political context that characterized Flanders between 1945 and 2000.

The societal context of Flanders between 1945 and 2000

The previously mentioned secularization of society was only one of a number of transformations that structurally changed Flanders between 1945-2000. First, as in most West European countries, the economy underwent a sequence of growth during the 1950s and 1960s and several successive impasses during the 1970s and 1980s. After World War II, Flanders invested heavily in new technologies and mechanization, which in turn resulted in economic growth and increased productivity.²⁰ The 1960s were a decade of unprecedented prosperity: both agrarian and industrial production quintupled, new markets were accessed, unemployment rates decreased and purchasing power grew.²¹ The golden years, however, came to an end with the oil crisis of 1973. In addition, the concurrent government deficits and debts steered Flanders (and Belgium) towards an economic recession. During the 1980s, the economic impasse hit hard and in an attempt to mediate, the government – with

¹⁹ Barry Brumett, *Techniques of Close Reading* (Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, London & Singapore: Sage, 2010).

²⁰ Eddie Niesten and Yves Segers, *Smaken van het land. Groenten en fruit vroeger en nu* (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2007) 105; Peter Scholliers, 'Novelty and Tradition. The New Landscape for Gastronomy', in: Paul Freedman (ed.), *Food. The History of Taste* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007) 337-345.

²¹ Vincent Dujardin and Michel Dumoulin, 'Maakt eendracht nog altijd macht? 1950-1970', in: Vincent Dujardin, Michel Dumoulin, Marnix Beyen and Philippe Destatte (eds.), *Nieuwe geschiedenis van België III. 1950-heden* (Tielt: Lannoo, 2009) 1479-1480; Peter Scholliers, *Arm en rijk aan tafel. Tweehonderd jaar eetcultuur in België* (Berchem: EPO, 1993) 191-192.

a Christian-democratic prime minister – implemented draconic measures to get the economy back on track. Wages were frozen and social security limited, resulting in increasing unemployment rates and decreasing purchasing power. It was not until the end of the 1980s that the economy began to recover.²²

Second, Flanders' employment structure changed considerably during these decades. Whereas the primary sector's employment rate reached 20% of total employment before World War II, it dropped to 8% by 1960. The tertiary sector's employment rate, in contrast, built up to 46% by 1960.²³ Furthermore, Flanders' changing employment structure prompted an increase in productivity and a consequential need for labor. Besides guest laborers, women progressively participated in the labor market. The 1947 census revealed a female labor market participation rate of 15.3% (married women), whereas the 1961 census attested to a rate of 20.5% (married women). These figures show that even though women already participated in the labor market before World War II, their wage-earning activities took up a growing share in the economy after 1945.²⁴

Third, political (and cultural) life witnessed the re-emergence of Flemish nationalism as of the 1960s. Collaboration by large parts of the Flemish movement with the German occupier during World War II resulted in negative sentiments towards the movement after the war.

²² Marnix Beyen and Philippe Destatte, 'Een ander land van 1970 tot vandaag', in: Vincent Dujardin, Michel Dumoulin, Marnix Beyen & Philippe Destatte (eds.), *Nieuwe geschiedenis van België III. 1950-heden* (Tielt: Lannoo, 2009) 1585-1594, 1611-1614, 1720-1725; Niesten & Segers, *Smaken van het land*, 141-146; Scholliers, *Arm en rijk aan tafel*, 192-193.

²³ Hannelore Vandebroek, *Het geslacht van de arbeid. Opvattingen over vrouwenarbeid in Belgische katholieke intellectuele kringen (1945-1960)* (Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 2002) 42.

²⁴ Hannelore Vandebroek and Leen Van Molle, 'The Era of the Housewife? The Construction of "Work" and the "Active" Population in the Belgian Population Census (1947, 1961 & 1970)', *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* 40 (2010) 59.

However, the increasing *Frenchification* of Brussels²⁵ and its surrounding Flemish communes soon flared up Flemish feelings. During the 1960s (and afterwards), the Flemish-nationalist party enjoyed growing popularity, while both the Christian-democratic and socialist party took a (moderate) Flemish turn in an attempt to maintain their electorate.²⁶

Finally, Flanders attested to the internationalization of the foodscape that influenced public and private foodways. Supermarkets stored a growing assortment of products with foreign origin (e.g. eggplant, *merguez* sausages, Californian wines and Asian noodles), restaurants diversified in light of migration flows (Italians in the 1960s, Asians in the 1970s, Africans in the 1990s) and multinationals introduced fast food joints that could be found all over the world (McDonald's being the most prominent example).²⁷ In the following paragraphs, I will analyze how this societal context translated into the above-mentioned magazines' recipe pages and their celebration of Christmas.

The Christmas table

Cooking by numbers

In this paragraph, I analyze how much attention the magazines paid to festive occasions, Christmas celebrations and the use of heritagization predicates in relation to Christmas recipes. A predicate analysis of *De Boerin/Bij de Haard/Eigen Aard* shows that, between

²⁵ Belgium is characterized by a difficult geo-political context: Dutch-speaking Flanders in the north, French-speaking with a minority of Dutch-speaking Brussels in the middle yet geographically encapsulated by Flanders, French-speaking Wallonia in the south. After World War II, this context has often lead to frictions in the political landscape that have put Brussels at the core of the debate.

²⁶ Kas Deprez and Louis Vos, 'Inleiding', in: Kas Deprez and Louis Vos (eds.), *Nationalisme in België. Identiteiten in beweging* (Antwerp & Baarn: Houtekiet, 1999) 17-20; André de Vries, *Flanders. A Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) 25-26; Els Witte, *Politieke geschiedenis van België van 1830 tot heden* (Brussels: VUB Press, 1997) 356-360.

²⁷ Scholliers, *Food Culture in Belgium*, 72.

1945 and 2000, 22.1% of the recipe pages dealt with festive occasions. If I break down this percentage even further, I find that out of all festive recipe pages 25.2% focused on New Year's Eve, 16.9% on Easter, 13.5% on Christmas and the remainder on a variety of occasions such as Lent and communions. Strikingly, the references to Christmas particularly surfaced during the first half of the period under investigation, whereas mentions of New Year's Eve increased between 1945 and 2000. I have no figures on the pre-war period, rendering a comparison impossible, yet at first glance the percentages support the secularization thesis I described in the introduction, indicating a decreasing interest in Catholic Christmas celebrations and increasing attraction towards the ideologically neutral and commercialized New Year's Eve. Interestingly, although both occasions took place around the table, they did not unilaterally result in the appropriation of dishes, preparations or ingredients as typical: in only 1.8% of the Christmas recipes did I identify heritagization predicates, often of a geographical nature, adding "Flemish" as denomination. Building on these findings, I conclude that the celebration of Christmas did not translate into typical foodways. A close reading of *De Boerin/Bij de Haard/Eigen Aard's* recipe pages is however needed to either confirm or overthrow this preliminary conclusion.

The socialist *De Stem der Vrouw* constructed different dynamics through its recipe pages and its consideration of festive culture. Out of all recipe pages, only 8.1% focused on festivities, while 84.2% of this share referred to New Year's Eve, 10.5% to Labor Day and 5.3% to Christmas. Mentions of New Year's Eve continuously surfaced between 1945 and 2000, while only a handful of editions focused on Christmas. The percentages and frequency support *De Stem der Vrouw's* non-Catholic framework, as they illustrate the magazine's interest in the non-religious New Year's Eve and its rather marginal consideration of Christmas. Additionally, the high number of references to New Year gives weight to the

before-mentioned secularization development; the mentions of Labor Day, in turn, fit the magazine's socialist ideology and indicate the diversification of the festive calendar in Flanders after World War II. And even though these holidays took place around the table, their celebration did not result in the unilateral heritagization of foodways, as is indicated by the overall 2.6% of heritagization recipes. Even in light of these low frequencies, it is worth asking how a socialist magazine represented a Catholic holiday and how it constructed a relationship between Christmas and typical foodways. Close reading of the recipe pages will formulate an answer to this question.

The agrarian magazine

Between 1945 and the end of the 1950s, the magazine described Christmas as "a genuine family feast"²⁸ that went hand in hand with "blissful family traditions".²⁹ These traditions supposedly included "homely coziness and happiness" and "an abundant table",³⁰ while they allegedly built on "mother and big sister"³¹ as key figures in the shaping of family happiness through food. On several occasions, *De Boerin/Bij de Haard/Eigen Aard* specified what the abundant table should look like: game and poultry, that were plentifully available during the winter season, gave it a festive feature,³² as did "a beautiful Christmas or New Year's cake".³³ In light of this paper's theoretical framework, *De Boerin/Bij de Haard/Eigen Aard* did make way of heritagization, although Christmas tradition focused more on family

²⁸ *De Boerin*, December 1950, 11.

²⁹ *De Boerin*, December 1947, 11.

³⁰ *De Boerin*, December 1947, 11.

³¹ *De Boerin*, December 1947, 11.

³² *De Boerin*, December 1946, 7; *Bij de Haard*, December 1949, 10; *Bij de Haard*, December 1950, 11; *Bij de Haard*, December 1956, 338.

³³ *De Boerin*, December 1947, 11.

life than it did on food. The magazine manifestly spoke of a tradition that brought the family together around the table, while it latently referred to an intergenerational aspect that focused on mother's and sister's role. Additionally, it advised its readers to prepare game, poultry and a Christmas cake, suggesting a relationship between the savory courses, the dessert and the holiday. However, the instructions did not construct these preparations and ingredients as traditional or typical. First, *De Boerin/Bij de Haard/Eigen Aard* did not provide any recipes for the courses it suggested, but instead stated the readers could prepare meals of their own choosing, and second, it classified the cake as both a Christmas and New Year's dessert. Consequently, the freedom of choice and the ambiguity of recipe classifications defied the notion of typicality, taking no account of any demarcation of a particular dish, preparation or ingredient as typical in light of the Christmas holiday.

Although the agrarian magazine did not engage in the heritagization of Christmas dinners during the 1940s and 1950s, it did use food in the heritagization of the family ideal during these decades, with Christmas as the vehicle and food as one of the building blocks in the appropriation (next to bliss, coziness and happiness). An explanation for the heritagization of the family ideal derives from the Christian-democratic family policy that found inspiration in the post-war demographic imbalance of increased death rates and decreased birth rates. In order to tackle the imbalance, the Christian-democrats proclaimed the importance of large families and women's dedication to their children. In 1949, for instance, the party issued a financial bonus per child for housewives who stayed at home and did not take up a wage-earning position.³⁴ Between 1945 and the end of the 1950s, *De Boerin/Bij de Haard/Eigen Aard's* Christmas discourse, with its focus on family life, trickled down from this political viewpoint. What is more is that the new policy was given a historical anchorage by

³⁴ Vandebroek, *Het geslacht van de arbeid*, 327-329, 357.

means of the notion of tradition. The magazine used Christmas celebrations to communicate a post-war political agenda and to convince its readership of that agenda's importance by adding a historical dimension. Between 1945 and the end of the 1950s, the agrarian magazine's heritagization initiatives in relation to Christmas thus entailed the appropriation of the family ideal to which food and its convivial capabilities contributed.

During the 1960s, *De Boerin/Bij de Haard/Eigen Aard* paid more attention to the culinary aspect of Christmas. Year after year, it served up an eclectic diversity of Christmas menus: Hawaiian dishes,³⁵ cold buffets and sandwiches,³⁶ Scottish meals³⁷ and menus with frozen pre-prepared foods³⁸ were just a fraction of the multitude of possibilities. This diversification complemented the broader societal context of a changing employment structure and female labor market participation. *De Boerin/Bij de Haard/Eigen Aard* acknowledged the growing number of wage-earning readers and published menus that fitted a changing lifestyle. Besides elaborate preparations, it also considered fast and easy dishes that sometimes just had to be defrosted and that were a time-saver for working women. Besides, the magazine responded to the internationalization of the foodscape by including foreign dishes and ingredients.

The diversification of Christmas menus took place within the continued heritagization of the family ideal. *De Boerin/Bij de Haard/Eigen Aard* maintained its previous agenda and emphasized "the cozy celebrations, the heartwarming family spirit" that characterized Christmas.³⁹ Important to point out is that the magazine added an additional layer to the

³⁵ *Bij de Haard*, December 1964, 32.

³⁶ *Bij de Haard*, December 1966, 40.

³⁷ *Bij de Haard*, January 1972, 42-43.

³⁸ *Bij de Haard*, December 1976, 62.

³⁹ *Bij de Haard*, December 1966, 40.

appropriation of the family ideal: it stated that family gatherings were a Flemish virtue that had to be safeguarded. “The family conviviality is our Flemish nature and we should preserve it”.⁴⁰ The addition of a geographical indication to the process of meaning-making surfaced in a political context of intensifying Flemish nationalism. During the 1960s, the Christian-democrats feared the growing popularity of the Flemish-nationalist party and took a moderate Flemish turn in a rather successful attempt to maintain their electorate. Consequently, *De Boerin/Bij de Haard/Eigen Aard* continued its discourse of family life, yet it added a geographical indication that tied this life to Flanders. Hence, Christmas became a Flemish family festivity and was appropriated as such by the Catholic community. By mentioning the preservation of family life, the magazine also constructed a historical dimension, anchoring Flemish Christmas celebrations in a Flemish past. The menu diversity, in turn, showed that even though food played a role in the heritagization of the family ideal, it was not the subject of the appropriation.

During the 1970s, the agrarian magazine’s Christmas menus increasingly diversified due to a changing societal context. The declining importance of the agricultural sector and the growing female labor market participation made *De Boerin/Bij de Haard/Eigen Aard* refocus: the magazine all the more catered to an implied audience of laboring housewives who did not have any direct affiliation with agriculture and whose cultural profile no longer corresponded with the Catholic agrarian audience the publication once wrote for. In terms of heritagization, the 1970s’ Christmas pages even saw the gradual disappearance of Flemish family life, illustrating *De Boerin/Bij de Haard/Eigen Aard*’s changing framework. It was not until the mid-1980s that the magazine dusted its Flemish background when it spoke

⁴⁰ *Bij de Haard*, December 1966, 40.

of “a delicious Flemish Christmas dinner for everyone’s budget”.⁴¹ The reference to budget undoubtedly found inspiration in the economic impasse of the 1980s in Flanders; Flemings had to make do with less purchasing power which translated into a frugal Christmas menu. Notwithstanding the sudden focus on thriftiness, Christmas remained a Flemish holiday to be celebrated amongst family, while Christmas dinner remained a means to that end. The magazine did not subject the menu to heritagization, but encapsulated it in the appropriation of the family ideal.

In 1988, *De Boerin/Bij de Haard/Eigen Aard* published a Christmas menu with “goodies that make us reminisce,” containing recipes for a prawn and melon salad, salmon and leek tart, lamb with pumpkin and *grand marnier* pie.⁴² The article reminisced about the celebration of family life, while it introduced a number of ingredients that were not widely known or used in Flanders in the 1980s, like prawns, pumpkin or lamb (which is not a winter but a spring product). In light of heritagization, *De Boerin/Bij de Haard/Eigen Aard* picked up on the previous appropriation of the family ideal in a Christmas context, while it did not translate the Christmas family get-togethers into typical foodways, but rather in innovation under the form of unknown or scarcely used products.

Finally, with respect to one of the questions raised in this paper’s introduction, namely if society’s secularization translated into changing meanings of Christmas and its foodways, I argue that in the case of the Catholic agrarian magazine, it did not. Besides the decreasing frequency and the dip in the 1970s, *De Boerin/Bij de Haard/Eigen Aard* continuously paid attention to Christmas and more importantly to family life that found inspiration in a Christian-democratic political agenda, or if we take it a step further, the Bible (“Be fruitful

⁴¹ *Bij de Haard*, December 1985, 32-33.

⁴² *Eigen Aard*, December 1988, 25-26.

and multiply”). In terms of typical foods, Christmas did not result in the heritagization of dishes, preparations or ingredients; Christmas dinner and its convivial capabilities did contribute to the appropriation of the family ideal.

The socialist magazine

De Stem der Vrouw interpreted the celebration of Christmas from a socialist viewpoint. Until the end of the 1950s, the magazine stripped the holiday from its Catholic meaning and reconstructed it in terms of socialism and emancipation. In 1946, it stated that “in an emancipated, free-thinking society [...] tradition still triumphs over reason,” yet “it would be a disgrace for family life to let the occasion pass”.⁴³ The magazine then embedded Christmas in a non-Catholic ideology, emphasizing the responsibility to preserve and spread Christmas’ original meaning of peace and love. *De Stem der Vrouw* situated this responsibility in an international context and a variety of religions, transcending the Catholic framework that society all too often took for granted. The references to an international context undoubtedly emanated from the editors’ turn towards the international socialist movement after World War II,⁴⁴ and as such reconstructed Christmas as a socialist holiday. Additionally, the magazine embedded the holiday in a socialist ideal of future-minded family life that built on happy childhood memories. Not once did the socialist monthly mention food in its assessment of Christmas, however. In light of heritagization, *De Stem der Vrouw*’s position was somewhat ambiguous; it discarded Christmas tradition as unreasonable on the one hand, but encouraged the holiday’s celebration in family circles on the other. The

⁴³ *De Stem der Vrouw*, December 1946, 2.

⁴⁴ Anneke Geyzen, ‘The Ideology of Convenience. Canned Foods in Women’s Magazines (Flanders, 1945-1960)’, *Appetite* 94 (2015) 21-25.

ambiguity allowed the socialist magazine to oppose against the Catholic meaning of Christmas and at the same time secularize the holiday as a socialist stage for the appropriation of the family ideal. The absence of food clearly shows that neither the celebration of Christmas nor the notion of family life resulted in the construction of typical foodways. Christmas was the vehicle to appropriate the family ideal, but food did not seem to fuel the appropriation in the early 1940s.

De Stem der Vrouw's December 1948 contribution continued the discursive construction of Christmas as a future-oriented socialist holiday, while it for the first time gave it a food-related dimension. Although the magazine prioritized Christmas' social role, it also recognized the importance of "a fine cuisine" and "good food".⁴⁵ It however did not mention what the content of this cuisine was or what it considered to be good food. Furthermore, the monthly added an intergenerational aspect to the matter as it drew attention to mother's role in preparing the food and to great-grandmother and grandmother's role in the celebration of Christmas. Striking is that the older generations' contribution did not entail food preparation, but their militancy to fight for a better future and forget the past. A piece published in 1950 built on this discourse, when it stated that Christmas should be used to organize family festivities in order to provide children with happy memories. "Such memories are one of the best things that we can give our children. They are part of our cultural and emotional heritage".⁴⁶ Through their militancy and their involvement in family life, the older generations built a heritage of happy memories and it was a socialist responsibility to give future generations the same opportunities. *De Stem der Vrouw* thus constructed Christmas as a social occasion that added to the socialist ideology.

⁴⁵ *De Stem der Vrouw*, December 1948, 4.

⁴⁶ *De Stem der Vrouw*, December 1950, 3.

It reminded of previous generations who fought for their emancipation and it mobilized future generations to continue the battle. Bonds between past and future generations were built during family occasions where memories were constructed. Food contributed to these occasions, but it did not play a pivotal role in the magazine's Christmas discourse. Like its agrarian counterpart, the socialist magazine used Christmas to appropriate the notion of family life and even though food contributed to family conviviality, it played a secondary role in the heritagization initiative.

Between 1945 and 2000, *De Stem der Vrouw* appropriated Christmas as a socialist holiday. On the few occasions it mentioned the occasion, it did so by discarding the unreasonable Catholic tradition and by taking on a future-oriented view in which both older generations and children played a primordial role. Besides, the magazine anchored the future in a socialist past of labor and emancipation struggles by mentioning "our heritage".⁴⁷ Christmas, in turn, was the vehicle to commemorate socialist battles and to envision future experiences of generations to come. This discourse found inspiration in *De Stem der Vrouw*'s political affiliations and the consequential attempt to convince voters of the socialist political agenda. Furthermore, it also countered the Christian-democrats' family policy that had gained momentum in the 1950s. Consequently, the magazine used a familiar Catholic feast, deconstructed its Catholic meaning and reconstructed it as a socialist occasion that contributed to socialist family life. Strikingly, the socialist meaning of Christmas did not translate into typical foodways: the magazine expected women to prepare a festive meal, but not once did it provide clear instructions on what dishes to serve or ingredients to use. Looking at the monthly's discourse on convenience,⁴⁸ it most probably

⁴⁷ *De Stem der Vrouw*, December 1950, 3.

⁴⁸ Gezyen, 'The Ideology of Convenience', 21-25.

expected women to spend as little time in the kitchen as possible and to prepare quick meals using pre-prepared or canned foods. *De Stem der Vrouw* did celebrate the taste and nutritional qualities of preserved food, which might account for the “fine” and “good” classifications it mentioned in the 1948 article. Food, finally, was a means to the heritagization of the family ideal, but it was not the subject of it.

With respect to one of the questions raised in this paper’s introduction, namely if the secularization of society in postwar Flanders translated into Christmas and its foodways, I conclude that in *De Stem der Vrouw* the holiday’s celebration most certainly did make way of secularization. Already in the 1940s, the magazine opposed against the holiday’s Catholic meaning and by 2000, Christmas disappeared from its recipe pages, articles and editorials. New Year and Labor Day, in contrast, increasingly filled the magazine and its recipe pages. This evolution illustrates the development mentioned in this paper’s introduction, namely that the secularization of society resulted in a decreasing number of Catholic holidays and a growing number of non-Catholic occasions.

Conclusion

This paper investigated the discursive construction of typicality vis-à-vis Christmas menus in Flanders between 1945 and 2000. It did so by using heritagization as theoretical framework and by means of a mixed methods approach of two ideologically diverging women’s magazines: the agrarian monthly *De Boerin/Bij de Haard/Eigen Aard* and the socialist monthly *De Stem der Vrouw*.

The analysis showed that neither of the magazines translated Christmas into typical dishes, preparations or ingredients. However, the magazines did use Christmas as a vehicle for the appropriation of the family ideal, to which food contributed. The agrarian magazine

anchored family life in a Flemish past, whereas the socialist magazine positioned it in a socialist future. Furthermore, the analysis provided a better understanding of the secularization development that characterized Flanders after World War II. While *De Boerin/Bij de Haard/Eigen Aard* witnessed a decreasing number of recipe pages dealing with Christmas by 2000, its discourse on family life, which found inspiration in a Catholic and Christian-democratic ideology, did not change throughout the period under investigation. The Christmas menus, however, did make way of diversification that reflected a changing societal context. The magazine had to cater for a diversifying readership, due to a changing employment structure and female labor market participation, and its focus on food changed accordingly. *De Stem der Vrouw*, in contrast, prioritized New Year's Eve and Labor Day, while it continuously deconstructed Christmas' Catholic meaning in favor of a socialist one. As such, the magazine contributed to the secularization of society.

This paper raises questions and issues that await scholarly attention. On the one hand, the women's magazines I analyzed should be compared to other sources in order to examine representativeness of the research findings. On the other hand, the relationship between festivities and foodways should be further questioned and researched. The empirical data in this paper have shown that the magazines did not translate Christmas into typical dishes or ingredients. Are these findings an anomaly within a broader context of various case studies? In order to find an answer to this question, more empirical research is needed and the taken-for-granted approach towards the relationship between festivities and foodways should be discarded.

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