

**THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE BUSINESS
NETWORKS OF MEN**

The business elite in Antwerp during the first half of the nineteenth century¹

University Antwerp-Hilde Greefs

Introduction

As far as the participation of women in the labour market was concerned, the nineteenth century held a strange position. Historians have long held the opinion that women were shut out from economic life during the age of modernisation and urbanisation. The emergence of new modes of production implied a division between the private and the public sphere. This seems to have had a negative effect upon female labour participation². Furthermore, the ideals of running the household pushed women aside. Their place became the private sphere. Men as breadwinners could spend their time in public spheres³.

But, opinions are divided on this issue. Some historians emphasise continuity instead of change. According to this view, the position of women in the labour market was not attractive at all in pre-industrial times. Also before industrialisation women found work in less appealing, poorly paid and unspecialised labour⁴. Moreover, women of the labour class did not have any choice during the nineteenth century: in spite of the bourgeois ideals they had to work for survival⁵.

Other researchers stress the importance of national and regional differences in legal structures, labour markets, traditions and habits. Female labour participation varied in space and time⁶. In countries like France and Belgium, for example, the economy rested on a great number of family enterprises which were environments where female labour participation seems to have been stimulated. Spouses worked together in the family enterprise and could replace one another. This is proved by the take-over by widows of the firm after the decease of their husbands. In some business niches and types of enterprises, such as retail, women specialised in the production or trade of food, cloths or luxury goods. Not only single women or widows with legal competence, but also married women acted as merchants in some countries and regions. In Belgium, for example, according to Napoleonic legislation, married women could do business on an independent basis once given permission by her husband⁷.

Women were also present at the top of the business. Until recently there has not been much attention paid to these women at the top, as far as Europe is concerned⁸.

¹ This text has to be considered as “work in progress” !

² For a critical overview of the male breadwinning debate, see: A. JANSSENS, *The male breadwinner*.

³ L. DAVIDOFF and C. HALL, *Family fortunes*.

⁴ See for instance: J.M. BENNETT, *Medieval Women*, p. 147-175

⁵ Female labour participation was essential in survival strategies of families, see for example: C. LIS, *Gezinsvorming en vrouwenarbeid*.

⁶ P. SHARPE, *Gender in the Economy*; A. SCHMIDT, *Vrouwenarbeid*, p. 10-15.

⁷ How men gave their permission was not precised in the legal texts: J.-P. NANDRIN, *Het juridisch statuut*, p. 40-45. Before the Napoleonic code women in Antwerp only needed a tacit approval from their husbands. L. VAN AERT, *Tussen norm en praktijk*.

⁸ See for example: M.B. YEAGER, *Women in business*, 3 vol. For Belgium: L. VAN MOLLE, *Zakenvrouwen of vrouwenzaken?*

Best known and discussed is the figure of the dynamic widow who took the lead of the firm after the decease of her husband⁹. Even in sectors hostile to women as the world of banking or heavy industry these widows could play a remarkable role¹⁰.

In this paper I will focus on the position and role of women at the top of the economic world, in the business elite. Women in the frontline or in the public sphere as *producers* of goods are not of primary concern here. My point of departure is the question: to what degree did women play an important role in the business world of men? In other words, how women functioned in the “male” business world as *intermediaries* of property, knowledge, name or relations. Special attention will be paid to the importance of women in networking. With this end in view I will participate in a debate outside the history of women and inside business history: the issue of how business networks are constructed, extended and reinforced.

The importance of relations in a business context

The idea of the entrepreneur as a rational decision maker, especially interested in making the most profit, does not fit with recent research in economics and history. Businessman or not, a human being is a social creature¹¹. Also in judgmental decisions – critical in a functional definition of entrepreneurship – the businessman was influenced by his environment - relatives, friends or different subcultures of a political, religious or ethnic kind¹².

According to this line of reasoning attention focused on the importance of a network of relations for business¹³. Especially trustworthy relations could be used to smooth transactions between people. Such relations were an important resource to collect information, but also to control the reliability of the gathered information.

Mark Casson expressed it as follows: “ ‘Who you know’ is often more important than ‘what you know’ because the people that you know can plug the gaps in what you know”¹⁴. Clearly, it is not so important to know a lot of people, but to get in touch with the right people. Sometimes, the best contacts were those who could provide a lot of practical, technical or commercial information. In other situations, it could be much more interesting to know people with numerous contacts. They could provide further information in their turn. Indeed, most important was to get the right information. As businessmen acted in an uncertain world, trustworthy relations could be of crucial importance to work out their business plan. This was even more the case in periods with relative simple and slow means of communication¹⁵.

Webs of contacts and relations do not appear out of the blue. One has to invest in the establishment, the maintenance and the strengthening of social relations. According to Pierre Bourdieu, investment in relations that could be useful in the short or the long run was of particular importance. Feelings of appreciation, respect and solidarity are not given, but closely connected with an efficient “social management”,

⁹ For the nineteenth century: for instance: M. SCHROVER, ‘De affaire wordt gecontinueerd’, p. 55.

¹⁰ For example: F. CROUZET, Aristocrate, femme, p. 163-180.

¹¹ M. GRANOVETTER, The social construction, p. 76-77.

¹² A comparison between neo-classical economic theory and social economics, see: A. ETZIONE, Socio-economics, p. 3-7; applications in historical research: for example: J. BROWN and M.B. ROSE, *Entrepreneurship. Networks*.

¹³ For instance: A.H. COLE, *Entrepreneurship*, p. 102-103 or in the overview by Y. CASSIS ed., *Business elites*.

¹⁴ M. CASSON, *Entrepreneurial networks*, p. 813.

¹⁵ M. CASSON, *Entrepreneurial networks*, p. 813-817; J. BROWN and M.B. ROSE, Introduction, p. 2-3.

as he called it. This links to the conscious establishment and cultivation of webs of relations¹⁶.

For long lasting business relations trust – the expectation that people will keep their promise – and reputation – the experience of the integrity of a person – were important. Trustworthy relations reduced the chance of deceit through expedient actions, although this was never excluded completely¹⁷.

As far as trustworthy relations are concerned, relatives played a key role in nineteenth century business life. Family members not only offered a reservoir of practical know-how (skill), capacity for work and eventually also capital. They often shared a common language, culture or work ethic. Furthermore, relatives offered a network of trust¹⁸. These trustworthy family relations could provide an important foundation to cope with the risks of doing business. Relatives could be used to reduce transaction costs of business activities. The personal ties between them implied the informal exchange of information, which could be confined to the family nucleus. Furthermore, clients' trust could be captured by appealing to the family reputation. If appropriate a network of family business could reduce costs in transactions of goods and services¹⁹.

In the private sphere, women played an important role in taking care and maintaining family relations. The task of women as hostess and organiser of the social activities in the domestic sphere were perfectly suited to nineteenth-century ideals of the bourgeoisie²⁰. But, also in the public sphere women could obtain an important role in networking. Mary Prior expressed it as follows in her research on the role of women in the Oxford world of business: “*The relationships of the women provided a hidden web of family influence*”²¹.

To what extent women could influence business life depended, according to her, on the market conditions. In periods of recession there was less migration to Oxford and the social structure became more patriarchal. During periods of prosperity and economic change women played an important role in trade and politics. Migrants appeared on the scene. By marrying “local” girls they became integrated in the local business networks. During transitional moments in history, women guaranteed stability and continuity at the same time.

The Antwerp case seems to be appropriate to test Prior's view. The beginning of the nineteenth century was a period of structural change and expansion in Antwerp. Furthermore, the transformation of the economy was accompanied by the influx of businessmen from outside, a situation which was completely new for Antwerp. These immigrated businessmen also tried to gain from the exceptional circumstances offered by the reopening of the river Scheldt to all maritime trade.

¹⁶ P. BOURDIEU, *Opstellen*, p. 133-134.

¹⁷ For example: C. LESGER, *Over het nut*, p. 69-74.

¹⁸ M.B. ROSE, *The family firm*, p. 64. For the importance of friendship in family relations: L. KOIJMANS, *Vriendschap*.

¹⁹ S. NENADIC, *The small*, p. 89; M.B. ROSE, *Introduction*, p. xviii.

²⁰ HOBBSAWM, *The age of capital*, p.230-250.

²¹ M. PRIOR, *Women and the urban economy*, p. 102.

The Antwerp case: the business elite in Antwerp at the beginning of the nineteenth century

In 1796 the lock on the river Scheldt, having been closed for two centuries for direct maritime transport, was removed as a manifestation of the French ideals of freedom²². Consequently, Antwerp was able to regain its position as the best located harbour town in the Southern Netherlands and, thanks to the modernisation process in the country, function as an important gateway for the industries located in the immediate hinterland. The excellent location for transit trade to northern France, the Rhineland and Switzerland, but also for maritime relations on the east-west axis to Great Britain and across the Atlantic further strengthened Antwerp's position.

In only a few decades Antwerp was transformed from a small trading place highly dependent upon and controlled by businessmen in the Northern Netherlands to a flourishing international seaport and trading centre²³. In 1800, Antwerp still was virtually non-existent as a port city. By 1840, measured by the total tonnage of ships entering the harbour, it ranked approximately twelfth or eighteenth in the world hierarchy of harbours²⁴.

For centuries different pressure groups in Antwerp had kept the dream of the reopening of the river Scheldt alive, hoping that the city would regain its former importance as an international port city and trading centre²⁵. Hence, all were keen to profit from the favourable prospects, above all the business community. The question is: were the business elite in Antwerp able to turn the new situation to their advantage. As it is impossible to obtain a clear view of the complete world of business, my research has been confined to a small nucleus of businessmen active during the early nineteenth century in Antwerp. This sample of 234 businessmen was selected on the basis of a wide range of sources covering the 1794-1825 period and indicating their financial capacity, social elite status as well as their economic activity²⁶.

In this sample I distinguished businessmen who were born in Antwerp (128 in the sample) from immigrants from inside (42) and outside the country (64). This distinction was not inspired by nationalistic thoughts, or by the idea that being a foreigner would automatically have certain advantages for international business²⁷.

²² As an international centre of trade, industry and finance, the port-city of Antwerp stood in the centre of the world economy during the "golden" sixteenth-century. After the rebellion of the Northern Netherlands against the Spanish government, the fall of Antwerp in 1585 and the restoration of the Spanish authority in the Southern Netherlands, the estuary of the river Scheldt came under control of the Northern Netherlands. This implicated that seaworthy ships could not sail directly to Antwerp anymore. Their freights had to be loaded on to smaller ships under the control of the government of the Northern Republic. Transaction costs thus rose dramatically, sharpened by high import and export-duties. Amsterdam became the new international trading centre at the expense of Antwerp.

²³ For an overview of the economic development of Antwerp during the first half of the nineteenth Century. See: K. VERAGHTERT, *From inland port*, p. 274-422; C. LIS, *Social change*.

²⁴ P. BAIROCH, *La Belgique*, p. 648-649.

²⁵ See for example: I. VAN DAMME, *Het vertrek van Mercurius*.

²⁶ For the selection of the group I used different sources: at one side quantitative, mostly fiscal, sources, such as the patent taxation or lists of the wealthiest citizens of the city made up by the local or provincial government; at the other hand, sources with uncertain (mostly qualitative) criteria, such as the election lists for the Court of Commerce, known as the "Liste des négociants notables". I used seven different sources, in totally offering 10 different lists of names, to select the important businessmen in the city. I used the patent taxation, installed by the French government, to be sure of their economic activity. See: H. GREEFS, *Zakenlieden in Antwerpen*, p. 24-38.

²⁷ In nineteenth century research, national feelings often feed the study of differences in behaviour between autochthonous and allochthonous people. G. BEETEMÉ, *Antwerpen*; B.S. CHLEPNER, *L'étranger*.

The typological difference on the basis of birthplace was inspired by the characteristics of the Antwerp economy during the eighteenth century and by the particular point of departure of the Antwerp story.

Research on their economic activities in Antwerp revealed that those from Antwerp and the immigrants from abroad took advantage of the circumstances in quite different ways²⁸. According to my information, immigrants from outside Antwerp dominated maritime trade in the harbour town during the first decennia of the nineteenth century. Their relations in their home country or elsewhere abroad seem to have eased their entry into the Antwerp commercial world significantly and supported their commercial activities. Clearly, they diversified their activities to trade related branches like shipping, maritime insurance or financial services to spread the risks, to support their trade activities or simply for profit. But, maritime trade remained their core business. Furthermore, they did not show any interest in local industries.

Their orientation differed fundamentally from the choices made by the Antwerp businessmen and by immigrants from inside the country already living in Antwerp in 1796. Only a minority stayed active in maritime trade for an extended period. Those from Antwerp, also keen on benefiting from the new opportunities, were only temporarily attracted to maritime trade. Confronted with the competition of a variable and constantly changing group of immigrants, they soon became aware of their own advantages, namely strong roots in the local community. They focused on the local sectors. Some stayed active in traditional sectors, like the silk business. Others gained from the growing supply of colonial goods. They concentrated on port related industries, such as sugar refining. A last group specialised in services like cashier and banking activities or the insurance business. Antwerp businessmen clearly faced strong arrears as far as the sea-trading business was concerned. Their hold on trade was also slowed down by their advantages in more locally embedded economic activities.

The different groups thus developed quite distinct entrepreneurial strategies. The question arises why. A part of the answer lies in the scope and the quality of the different groups' networks of relations. Women played an important role here.

The role of women in the business networks of men

Due to a lack of ego documents like diaries or letters I was obliged to search for the role of women in networking indirectly. A rudimentary identification of the spouses of the businessmen selected – their geographic and social roots – provides a first impression.

Marriages were indeed useful for the establishment or strengthening of personal contacts. They could stir a sense of belonging in the couple and between their families²⁹. Such family relations could also be mobilised for business: for the gathering of information on a trustworthy basis, for the formation of new or the consolidation of existing business contacts and in the search for a good employee or fresh capital. The wife could be an important informal partner for business through her work, capital, knowledge and relations with relatives or friends³⁰. A good marriage could also be a “partnership”, just like in business.

²⁸ This is a short overview of the conclusions of my research on the economic activity of the 234 businessmen selected H. GREEFS, *Zakenlieden*, deel 2.

²⁹ J. KOCKA, *The Entrepreneur*, p. 523-527.

³⁰ C. HALL, *White, male*, p. 180.

Clearly, I do not know the intentions of the spouses when describing marriage patterns. Neither have I wanted to narrow marriages to a carefully thought-out business strategy. Endogamy – or marriage in the same social group – could also be a consequence of already existing social webs. Contacts and webs were facilitated when sharing the same circles – with the same language, religion or social standing. This also facilitated marriage. Furthermore, a “good” marriage was not necessarily made from an economic viewpoint nor was it a guarantee for success in business. The grocer Pierre Jean Gevers, for example, married his servant girl. It did not prevent him from building up a career as a very important “sugar baron” in Antwerp³¹.

Marriages were not only the consequence of economic reasoning. But, in these circles marriages based on emotional ties alone could provoke a great deal of criticism. Jean Mathias Gogel, for example, was excluded from his family circle when he was courting and later on married the daughter of an official of a low status³². Daniel Thuret, from Amsterdam, needed years to convince the Antwerp Guyot family of noble birth to allow him to marry their daughter. The story goes that he came to Antwerp in 1798 to arrange a business dispute. There he met Françoise Guyot. Their contacts were not appreciated by her family. According to her uncle Henri Joseph de Stier “*celui qu’elle voulait épouser était calviniste*” (the one she loved was a Calvinist) and “*en plus, socialement inconnu à Anvers*” (furthermore, he was socially unknown in Antwerp)³³. The Guyot family agreed only eight years later. First, Daniel Thuret had to convert to Catholicism. Then, he had to provide financial means. He brought the fabulous amount of 808.487 Belgian francs to their marriage³⁴. In these circles, it was important to choose a partner of equal merit or at least from a family of standing³⁵.

In company names it was not unusual to mention both family names. This is also an indication of the social and economic value given to these family unions. Examples are the firms of François Joseph Bisschop-Basteyns, Jean Jacques Van den Berghe-Aerts or Jean Benoit Stappaerts-Ceulemans³⁶.

Perpetuating or consolidating international relations: the foreign business community in Antwerp

As far as international contacts were concerned, the Antwerp businessmen were at a disadvantage compared to the immigrants. Geographic roots, family ties, training and travelling abroad favoured the foreigners, as well as some immigrants from inside the country. Their migration even took place within a criss-cross pattern and as a part of a well-considered strategy to protect and expand existing business networks³⁷. The data

³¹ He married in 1806 with Jeanne Catherine Devoght, daughter of a bricklayer. She had no capital at all. State Archives Antwerp, *Notarial Records*, 10839, P.J.L. Meert, nr. 95 (20 december 1855). See for an overview of his career: H. HOUTMAN-DE SMEDT, *Korte historische*.

³² R. JUNG, *Die Frankfurter*, p. 37.

³³ P. THURET, *Recherches*, p. 291.

³⁴ R. BAETENS, *Schoten*, p. 103.

³⁵ Examples in C. LIS and H. SOLY, *Te gek*, p. 61-62.

³⁶ Cf. *infra* the example of the couple Stappaerts-Ceulemans.

³⁷ For example: Jean Mathias Gogel from Frankfurt stayed in Göteborg, Stockholm and Stralsund before moving to Antwerp; Abraham Meyer and Pierre Coste from Geneva in Hamburg and Paris, Frédéric Riem from Kreuznach in Amsterdam and the Scot James Thompson in Genua. Jean Guillaume Rücker from Hamburg, Edmond and James Clegg from Manchester, Josua Metcalf from Leeds, Charles Tindal from Schelfmford and the Scot John Kennibrough lived for a while in Londen before moving to Antwerp. State Archives Antwerp, *Civil Records Antwerp*, Registers of population, 1800-

suggest that foreigners also intentionally maintained their relations abroad during their stay in Antwerp. This happened in different ways: by travelling, establishing branches of their business or sending children abroad³⁸.

Furthermore they choose a spouse in foreign business circles. The foreign businessmen in the sample were all first generation migrants. Three quarter were married³⁹. A small group came to Antwerp with their spouse and family. Mostly, their wives came from the same region⁴⁰. Others married during their stay in a different country. Frédéric Riem from Kreuznach, for example, married Marie Inghend, when he lived and worked in Amsterdam. The partner of Abraham Ellerman, born in Altona, came from Dublin, while Eugène Rymenans of Malines married during his stay in Düsseldorf. Their stay abroad was valorised by their marriage. These family relations could be of great use in Antwerp: Riem, for example, specialised in the grain trade and could rely on his connections in Amsterdam, which was traditionally a very important centre for grain trade. Abraham Ellerman became a British citizen and specialised after his arrival in Antwerp in the import of colonial goods and factory-made products from Great-Britain. Eugène Rymenans became a wealthy merchant thanks to smuggling during the Continental Blockade (1806-1813). Antwerp and Düsseldorf functioned as junctions in this illegal trade⁴¹.

Most foreign businessmen were young and moved to Antwerp alone. They married when their apprenticeship was over or when they had taken their first steps in business. Their spouses mostly came from abroad as well and moved to Antwerp after the marriage. How they met each other is very difficult to know. Maybe they knew each other before moving to Antwerp? Or did they come in contact through family members, other foreigners in Antwerp or through business relations? It is not possible to answer these questions. Nevertheless, some examples suggest that these marriages were also the result of networking.

Jean Abraham and Guillaume Nottebohm of Bielefeld grew up in a business family: their brother Charles Louis was trading in Hamburg, their brothers-in-law Theodor Adolf Möller, Karl von Laer and David Friedrich Weber worked as merchants in Kupferhammer, Bielefeld and Hamburg⁴². After Jean Abraham's move to Rotterdam in 1830, the Nottebohm family possessed branches in three import harbours at the North Sea: in Antwerp, Rotterdam and Hamburg. The Nottebohm house became a real international merchant house⁴³. Guillaume Nottebohm probably met his fiancée in circles of foreign businessmen in Antwerp. In 1812, he married with Marie Anne Primavesi from Münster. She moved to Antwerp and brought servants and her mother,

1829. The dominance of the so-called "stepwise migration" patterns from city to city and often even from port to port do reveal that these people were in search for the most suitable place for their commercial activities.

³⁸ H. GREEFS, *Zakenlieden*, p. 315-324.

³⁹ Cf. tabel as appendix.

⁴⁰ Thomas Wilson was married with Elisabeth Gunnis. Both were born in Londen. Louise Amij, spouse of Louis Felix Oboussier was born in Lauzanne and stayed in Paris together with her husband; Adriaan Saportas married with Marie Jeanne Van Ellinckhuizen, from a Rotterdam merchant family.

⁴¹ The information on trade activities of Ellerman and Riem are deduced from samples in the shiparrivals in Antwerp. City Archives Antwerp, *Bib*, 3400, Arrivages, 1817, 1827. For the smuggling of Rymenans: R. DUFRAISSE, *Contrebandiers*, p. 209-211.

⁴² Her eldest sister was married in 1791 with Theodor Adolf Müller, Johanna Karolina married with Karl von Laer of Bielefeld and Charlotte Henriette with David Weber. Nottebohm aus Bochum, kol. 83-85; P.W. DE LANGE, *Nottebohm*, kol. 112-113.

⁴³ S.D. CHAPMAN, *International houses*, p. 5.

Gertrude Giese along. Her mother was a relative of Anton Giese, who was working in Antwerp as a shipbroker. He was also an uncle of the brothers Nottebohm⁴⁴.

But, connections did not always pass through businessmen who had already moved to Antwerp. The brothers Georges Frédéric and Christian Emmanuel Kreglinger from Karlsruhe arrived in Antwerp in 1797⁴⁵. In 1804, at the age of 34, Christian Emmanuel Kreglinger married Charlotte Troistorff, daughter of Mathias Troistorff and Magdalena Böcking. His father-in-law was an important textile industrialist in Monschau. The sister of his wife Scheibler, spouse of the sister of Charlotte Troistorff, became a partner in the merchant house G. & C. Kreglinger in Antwerp around 1807. In 1809, at the age of 44, Georges Frédéric Kreglinger sought a partner in the same circles. He chose Anne, daughter of Frédéric Paul Schlösser, also a textile industrialist in Monschau. The financial support of the partners was limited. But for business, their relations were of particular importance. Bernard Scheibler, J. Henri Scheibler, Fred. Schlösser and P.W. Troistorff were the most important clients of the firm G. & C. Kreglinger during the French period⁴⁶. By their marriage, the two leaders of the firm confirmed and reinforced their customer relations⁴⁷.

As the wives of the founders, Charlotte Troistorff and Anne Schlösser held an important position in the firm G. & C. Kreglinger. When their partners were still alive, they reinforced the ties with foreign merchant families, like the Scheiblers, for example. After the decease of their husbands they were important as sponsors and elements of stability for the firm.

Around 1797 the two brothers inaugurated the merchant house G. & C. Kreglinger. They made a hole-and-corner arrangement. In 1807 Charles Scheibler, married with Marie Christine Troistorff who was a sister of Christian Kreglinger's wife, entered the firm⁴⁸. He was 37 years old and got 20% on net returns for his work in the firm. The two brothers divided the rest in equal parts. After the unexpected decease of Christian Kreglinger in 1813 (he was 41 years old) Scheibler became a partner in the business⁴⁹. When also Georges Frédéric died in 1821, Scheibler run the business. The sons of the founders were still minors. To keep the firm balanced, a new Kreglinger had to be found.

This was arranged as well. Since 1807-1808 Joseph Mathias Kreglinger, a nephew of the founders, entered the firm as an apprentice⁵⁰. In 1822 he also became a partner in the merchant house. Like Charles Scheibler and the two widows of the founding fathers, Charlotte Troistorff and Anne Magdalena Schlösser, he received a quarter of the net returns for his services⁵¹. Joseph Mathias Kreglinger reinforced his ties with the Antwerp branch of the family through his marriage in 1826 with Elise Kreglinger, daughter of Christian Emmanuel, one of the founding fathers⁵². This opened his way to the leadership of the firm. The two widows remained sleeping

⁴⁴ State Archives Antwerp, *Civil Records Antwerp*, 1815-1829, II-633.

⁴⁵ R. BAETENS, *Het ontstaan*, p. 19.

⁴⁶ R. BAETENS, *Het ontstaan*, p. 23-24, 54.

⁴⁷ The families Scheibler, Troistorff and Schlösser controlled 80% of the cloth production in Monschau. R. BAETENS, *Het ontstaan*, p. 23.

⁴⁸ Charles Frederic Scheibler of Monschau married in 1797 with Marie Christine Troistorff, a:sl of Monschau. Her sister, Charlotte Elisabeth, married in 1804 with Christian Kreglinger.

⁴⁹ R. BAETENS, *Het ontstaan*, p. 25; State Archives Antwerp, *B.S.A.*, *Overlijdens*, volume 102, nr. 976.

⁵⁰ Joseph Mathas Kreglinger was the son of Jean Frédéric Kreglinger, a brother Georges Frédéric and Christian Kreglinger.

⁵¹ City Archives Antwerp, *MA*, 1037/1, map 3, *Circulaires des maisons de commerce*, 1 augustus 1821; R. BAETENS, *Het ontstaan*, p. 25.

⁵² State Archives Antwerp, *N* 699, A. Gleizes, 11 juli 1826.

partners in the firm until their decease in 1852 and 1856. The name G. & C. Kreglinger remained the brand name of the firm until well into the twentieth century⁵³.

Widows and relatives played an important role guaranteeing the stability of the Kreglinger firm. This was not exceptional and even occasionally took on peculiar forms. After the decease of his wife Marie Elisabeth Albert in 1832, Liévin Chrétien Lemmé married her sister Marie Adèle. Shortly after the death of Liévin Chrétien Lemmé in 1863, his brother Jean Louis Lemmé died too. The two brothers had founded a merchant company in Antwerp. As a consequence of the political unrest and economic uncertainty due to Belgian Independence in 1830, they established a branch in London to spread the risks. Jean Louis Lemmé became the head of the branch and moved to the British capital⁵⁴. When Liévin Chrétien died, he left two daughters. Louis Lemmé, son of Jean Louis Lemmé moved from London to Antwerp. He married his aunt, the widow of Livién Chrétien Lemmé, in 1867⁵⁵. After his marriage he associated with Jacques Ernest Osterrieth. Osterrieth married Marie Adèle Lemmé, daughter of the couple Lemmé-Albert, in 1859. Thanks to this configuration, the survival of the firm J.L. Lemmé & co. could be guaranteed.

The international character of the family relations was also preserved during the next generations. Even then one can only exceptionally speak of a melting together of Antwerp and foreign businessmen. Consider the Kreglinger and Nottebohm families. They both belonged to the absolute top of the German business world in Antwerp.

Guillaume Nottebohm had four children: the eldest son Christian stayed single; Caspar André married with Sieglinde Von Laer, daughter of a merchant in Bielefeld. Emilie was joined in marriage with the Scot John Mathias Fraser. Fraser worked as a merchant in Antwerp for a while, but moved to London afterwards. Only Abraham Edouard married a girl of the Antwerp business elite⁵⁶. The daughters of Christian Kreglinger married merchants in Bonn and Cologne. The only exception to the rule was Elise Kreglinger who married in Antwerp with her nephew Joseph Mathias Kreglinger⁵⁷. The children of Christian's brother and business partner Georges Frédéric Kreglinger also married in circles of merchants in Cologne and Aachen⁵⁸. Only Louise Kreglinger married in Antwerp. Charles Alfred Oboussier, the son of a businessman from Lausanne who had moved to Antwerp, became her spouse. These businessmen maintained strong international ties through marriage. They built up their networks of relations on an international scale. The choice of partners in the Kreglinger family proved that these marriage patterns continued⁵⁹. Clearly, their marriages might also betray a devotion to the mother country, to a common language, cultural or religious ties – many of the German immigrants, for example, were Protestants. But, their marriages were also

⁵³ H.A. MUNTJEWERFF, *Kapitaal*, p. 74-75; H. HOUTMAN-DE SMEDT, *De bank G. & C. Kreglinger*, p. 195

⁵⁴ State Archives Antwerp, *B.S.A.*, *Overlijdens*, volume 152, nr. 2337; G. DEVOS, *Lemmé Famille*, in G. KURGAN-VAN HENTENRIJK e.a. ed., *Dictionnaire*, p. 427.

⁵⁵ State Archives Antwerp, *N* 111274, F.A. Gheysens, nr. 159 (17 september 1867).

⁵⁶ State Archives Antwerp, *N* 11295, P.J.A. Deckers, nr. 280 (15 november 1867); Nottebohm, in *Deutsches*, p. 85. For Fraser also: G. BEETEMÉ, *Antwerpen*, deel 2, p. 52.

⁵⁷ Emilie Kreglinger married in 1831 with Jean Henri Offermann; Fanny married in 1831 with Louis Theodore Rautenstrauch. R. BAETENS e.a. ed., *Spiegels*, p. 336; G. BEETEMÉ, *Antwerpen*, deel 2, p. 325.

⁵⁸ Emma Kreglinger married in 1833 with Jean Frederic Ingenohl, merchant in Köln. Theo Paul Kreglinger married with Emilie Helena Walther, daughter of Charles Walther, merchant in Aachen, and Elvira Troistorff. By doing so, he connections with the family Troistorff were strenghtened again.

⁵⁹ R. BAETENS e.a. ed., *Spiegels*, p. 333-336.

interesting from a business point of view: their networks of relations stayed international thanks to their marriage policy.

A further embedding in local circles: the Antwerp businessmen

The foreign businessman in Antwerp concentrated on the international trading business and reinforced their relations across the borders through marriage. In the meantime the business activities and relations networks of the Antwerp businessmen seem to have been focused on Antwerp.

These businessmen of Antwerp origin were mostly only temporarily attracted to maritime trade. It is my hypothesis that they were fully aware of their advantages in locally embedded economic activities, particularly as they felt the competition of a variable group of foreign merchants in international trade. Using their trump cards, namely being deeply entrenched in the vast local capital market, they could compensate their initial backwardness in terms of sea trading. Furthermore, these local niches also offered favourable prospects. The importance of a strong establishment in local business circles was probably less pressing for international trade than it was for local banking business, the local industries and probably also – but for this I did not have the relevant sources at my disposal – the local distribution of imported goods. It is my hypothesis that here lies the key to understanding the different patterns followed by the selected businessmen. At the local level, the Antwerp businessmen had strategic advantages compared to the outsiders. The Antwerp financial-economic elite were entwined by different forms of collaboration among family relations. These ties became only stronger during the nineteenth century. Some examples will prove this case.

When the father of Joseph Guillaume De Broëta (born in 1743) died in 1746, his widow remarried, one year later, with the textile merchant Jean François Vermoelen. Their son, Jean François junior, married in 1781 with Isabelle Marie Kannekens and founded different industrial enterprises in the Antwerp region with his brothers-in-law. The sons of the couple Vermoelen-Kannekens died young. One of their three daughters, Isabelle Marie, married in 1808 with Charles Henri De Wael. He was the son of the merchant Norbert Louis Joseph De Wael, already related to the Vermoelen family by his second marriage in 1792 with Antoinette Vermoelen. The De Broëta, Kannekens, Vermoelen and De Wael family all belonged to the financial-economic elite of Antwerp during the eighteenth century⁶⁰. Thanks to their family ties they could rely on a relation network across the firm. At best, this network spanned different economic activities: commercial, industrial and financial⁶¹.

For Charles Henri De Wael marriage meant the introduction to the world of business. He was 21 years old when he entered the firm of his in-laws. But, this required some financial investment/ contribution on his part according to his marriage contract with Isabella Vermoelen from 1808. While the bride only entered a sum of 4.535 Belgian francs, the bridegroom offered 22.678 Belgian francs. Furthermore, he engaged the undivided goods of his uncle, Corneille Van Winghen, and his part of the legacy of his mother, estimated at 125.000 Belgian francs. His father promised to offer him 4.353,75 Belgian francs annually “*par forme de pension viagère*” . If

⁶⁰ K. DEGRYSE, *De Antwerpse fortuinen*, bijlage Ia, p. 125, 221, 226-228 en Ib, p. 8 en 51.

⁶¹ For example: M.B. ROSE, *The family firm*, p. 67 en R.A. POLLAK, *A transaction*, p. 214.

Charles Henri De Wael died and his children were still minors, this sum was to be given to his widow⁶².

Charles Henri De Wael was very young, but a marriage could change the career of older businessmen fundamentally too. This happened to Jean Benoit Stappaerts, a stockbroker after his second marriage with Pauline Ceulemans. She was one of the daughters of Jean Jacques Ceulemans and Jeanne Catherine Basteyns both from a merchant family⁶³. When her husband died in 1812, Jeanne Catherine Basteyns took the lead of the merchant firm. She managed the company on her own behalf and in the name of her six children. The branch name was Ceulemans-Basteyns, referring to the married couple. Soon after the marriage of Jean Benoit Stappaerts and Pauline Ceulemans (on 5 August 1835) the widow Ceulemans died (on 12 May 1836)⁶⁴. Jean Benoit Stappaerts gave up his work as stockbroker and became partner in the merchant firm Ceulemans-Basteyns, together with his two brothers-in-law François and Auguste Ceulemans⁶⁵. François Ceulemans stayed in the firm until his decease in 1843, Jean Benoit Stappaerts and Auguste Ceulemans gave up the business on 1 July 1844⁶⁶. Later on, the merchant affairs were continued by Henri Le Brasseur. Thanks to his marriage to Emilie Ceulemans, the affairs stayed in the Ceulemans family⁶⁷. Henri le Brasseur was the son of a wine merchant Servais Le Brasseur⁶⁸.

These Antwerp businessmen were aware of the importance of choosing a convenient partner. They looked for her in business circles. Others found their bride-to-be in circles of gentlemen or landlords. Examples are Albert Cogels, Gérard Le Grelle and Charles Borrekens⁶⁹. The Cogels, Le Grelle and Borrekens families were already ennobled during the eighteenth century⁷⁰. They belonged to aristocratic circles in Antwerp and kept these ties close by their marriage policy. In London as well, important bankers ennobled and choose their spouse in aristocratic circles⁷¹. This rubbing of shoulders with the gentry did not only offer entrance to the aristocratic world, but was also important for business. For bankers like Gérard Le Grelle and Albert Cogels in Antwerp, their marriage ensured ties with these influential and often very rich aristocrats. Furthermore, these gentlemen were important customers of their banking company.

And...spouses had an important role to play here as well. The not so hopeful commercial prospects in eighteenth century Antwerp had incited an important group of wealthy businessmen to withdraw from business and take on an aristocratic

⁶² State Archives Antwerp, *N*, F. Tilleux (Ekeren), nr. 235 (12 december 1867).

⁶³ The father of Jeanne Catherine Basteyns was the merchant Jean Baptiste Basteyns. After his decease his daughters and their husbands continued the business. Jean Jacques Ceulemans founded the firm Ceulemans-Basteyns. The sister of Jeanne Catherine Basteyns, Marie Anne, was married with François Joseph Bisschop of the firm Bisschop-Basteyns.

⁶⁴ State Archives Antwerp, *N* 1390, F.B. Van Dael, nr. 73 (30 July 1835).

⁶⁵ City Archives Antwerp, *MA*, 4789, Patentrollen, II-1661.

⁶⁶ State Archives Antwerp, *N* 7468, X.A. Gheysens, nr. 3584 (31 December 1844).

⁶⁷ State Archives Antwerp, *N* 7468, X.A. Gheysens, nr. 3584 (31 December 1844); G. BEETEMÉ, *Antwerpen*, part 2, p. 26.

⁶⁸ He first married with Marie Josephine Van den Bogaert, the only child of Martin Emmanuel Van den Bogaert. His father-in-law died the 25 of September 1826, his wife on 15 of Juin 1827. He was the only heir and continued the firm until he married for the second time. State Archives Antwerp, *N* 4839, J. Hanegraeff, nr. 292 (26 November 1831).

⁶⁹ Albert Cogels huwde met Marie Della Faille de Leverghem, Charles Borrekens met Isabelle Wellens en Gérard Le Grelle met Anne Françoise Van Lancker.

⁷⁰ K. DEGRYSE, *De Antwerpse fortuinen*, appendix Ia and Ib.

⁷¹ G. JONES, *Merchants*; S.D. CHAPMAN, *The rise*.

lifestyle⁷². After the reopening of the river Scheldt most of them stayed out of business. An exception to the rule was Pierre Joseph De Caters. His father, Jean Pierre Ernest De Caters, specialised in investments in real estate during the eighteenth century⁷³. In 1810 Pierre Joseph De Caters married with the widow of a rich banker Charles Jean Michel De Wolf. Thanks to his marriage Pierre Joseph De Caters entered business life. His wife could offer him business opportunities and a clientele. Pierre Joseph De Caters could offer his standing, aristocratic relations and also a little capital in return⁷⁴.

Some final remarks

In this paper I focused on the indirect role of women in the business networks of men. I looked at marriages from a business perspective, focusing on the potential contribution of women to the business relations and activities of men. I did not consider the personal motivations or intentions of partners. Furthermore, I could not discern whether the marriages were the consequence of existing social networks binding people with the same language, religion or a common cultural, social or economic background. Or if the bride made part of a (un)conscious social or economic choice.

But, a careful analysis of these marriage patterns suggests that their social frameworks and relations seem to have been a translation of entrepreneurial choices and patterns. The Antwerp business men in the sample were only temporarily attracted to maritime trade. Confronted with the competition of a variable and constantly changing group of immigrants, the Antwerp businessmen soon were aware of their own advantages, namely a strong embedment in the local community. They focused on the local sectors. Their marriage pattern was a copy of this business behaviour. Antwerp businessmen married into circles of rich Antwerp families. They reinforced their entrenchment in the local elite. Immigrants from outside Antwerp dominated maritime trade in the harbour town during the first decennia of the nineteenth century. The spouses of these foreign merchants mostly came from abroad. They strengthened their international contacts. These patterns are also repeated in the second generation. Local businessmen preferred to marry an Antwerp girl; foreigners reinforced their relations abroad or married in circles of foreign businessmen who had settled in Antwerp. Spouses usually had a similar social background. They originated from business families or – in the case of some Antwerp families – circles of land owners and gentry. One can speak of a merging of “connubium” (marriage) and “commercium” (commerce) in Antwerp.

As Mary Prior demonstrated for Oxford, women in Antwerp formed a vital link for the business networks of men in this period of economic expansion. But, they did not fulfil a bridging function between the different groups according to their geographical origin – those from Antwerp and the immigrants. Instead, women seem to have reinforced the embedment – be it local or international – that these business groups aimed for out of business interests.

⁷² K. DEGRYSE, *The Aristocratization*, p. 35-40

⁷³ K. DEGRYSE, *De Antwerpse fortune*, appendix Ib, p. 13-14.

⁷⁴ H. HOUTMAN-DE SMEDT, *In de stroom*, p. 109, footnote 1.

APPENDIX

Table 1: Marriage state and geographic origin of the spouse of the businessmen in the sample, in %

	Marriage state and geographic origin of the spouse				
	Unmarried	Married			
		Antwerp	Immigrants from inside the country	Immigrants from abroad	Unknown
Businessmen of the sample in total n=234	16,7	39,8	8,5	15,8	19,2
Thereof Antwerp n=128	14,8	56,3	5,5	2,3	21,1
Thereof immigrants from inside the country n=42	4,7	28,7	23,8	9,5	33,3
Thereof immigrants from abroad n=64	28,1	14,1	4,7	46,8	6,3

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