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COLLOQUIUM: PARADOXES OF CONFLICTS

PARADOXES OF POLITICAL CONFLICTS

CASE STUDY: THE ECLIPSE OF THE BELGIUM FIRST PRIME MINSITER (BELGIUM 1830), BY VARDA FURMAN

INTRODUCTION

While trying to understand paradoxes of political conflicts, the reading of an historic document can be revealing. What seems at first sight to be an apologetic letter, is in fact an incitement to a political revolution through dictatorial regime. In other words, I claim that Louis De Potter's apparently innocent letter appeals to establish a dictatorial regime in Belgium in 1830. That position, which will become explicit in De Potter political writings 20 years later (in 1850), appears, in an implicit level, in 1830. The volte-face in De Potter conception, from a revolutionary-progressive one to a dictatorial and reactionary one, occurred at the very beginning of the Belgian national revolution.

The structure of this article: In the introduction I shall present the problematic, the historical context – the political movement to which the Prime minister belonged and his specific role within that movement. In the first chapter I will discuss my approach and my methodology and the notion of paradox. In the second chapter I will analyze the explicit aspects of De Potter's demission letter. We will discuss the foresight of Belgium's first Prime-minister, which unmasks the paradox inherent in the Belgian revolutionary model. In the third chapter, I will analyse the implicit aspects of the letter and the relations between De Potter and Auguste Blanqui. I will demonstrate that the Blanquist model takes the form of a syncretism and that it resulted in replacing, unconsciously, one paradox with another. The conclusion will be a close up on De Potter's defeat. I will analyse it from different points of view: De Potter, his fellows and a retrospective point of view.

Pragmatic analysis will be revealing in this case. In the conclusion, I will also look at De Potter's role in the political culture of his period and try to bring a more general philosophical framework from the Belgian case study to the understanding of paradoxes of political conflicts in other contexts.

The historical context:

The reason behind the meteoric fall of Belgium's first Prime minister remains a mystery. How does a national hero fall from the height of his political career to a

life in exile? And why was he subjected to the worst sanction for a political figure: to be forgotten and erased from the national history?

No Belgian nowadays remembers the name of the first Prime minister. Only 33 days elapsed from his triumphant entry to Brussels, the 28 September 1830, and his famous resignation letter from the provisional government.

In the present paper we will **try to decipher his mysterious fall**. Our study is based on a close up reading of his resignation letter, in the context of his political writings as a whole. From the rhetorical-pragmatic analysis we will try to understand the Politician loss of power.

Before focusing on the Belgian Prime-minister famous letter, we first need an understanding of the historical context – the 1830 revolutions in Europe and De Potter’s political movement.

The wave of revolutions which swept through Europe in 1830, first in France and then in Belgium [the 25, 26 and 27 of August 1830], Spain, Italy, Poland and Germany, drastically altered the political order which existed in Europe since the Pact of Vienne (both in terms of the internal politics of these countries and the relations between them). On the one hand, the revolutionary forces, represented by the camp of *Movement*, who aspired to liberate Europe from the remains of the Old Regime and to establish in Europe Republics and universal suffrage; on the other hand, the *Reactionary* forces, with Russia, Prussia and Austria at the head, who sought to re-establish *Order*. In this battle, the neo-babouvist revolutionary movement has a moment of grace.

The neo-babouvist socialist movement emerged as an alternative to the terrorist guerrilla actions of the Blanquism (Auguste Blanqui), on the one hand, and the utopian socialists, on the other. It paved the way to a new form of socialist action based on the idea of revolution without violence; based on a wide network of political and social associations, and on the persuasion effort through multi-faceted polemics. In the neo-babouvist movement, who had groups all over Europe, the Italian **Buonarroti** played a pivot role. Buonarroti’s project was that Brussels would become a strategic centre of the revolution in Europe, a real cross-road.

Who was Louis De Potter? He was a Belgian neo-babouvist who held a key position in the Belgian History of the 1830. He was born in 1786 to a noble family and at a young age he dedicated himself to the liberation of Belgium from Dutch rule. He started to act in the Liberal movement as a journalist in 1823. In 1830 was detected by Buonarroti as a powerful revolutionary and Buonarroti counted on him to liberate the state of Belgium.

For his revolutionary article, the 30 April 1830, he was condemned by the King Guillaume d'Orange to 8 years in exile. He was in France at the start of the revolution in Paris. Following the outbreak of the Belgian revolution, on the 28th September 1830, he arrived in Bruselles by a triumphant march. He was co-opted into the provisional government, elected by the Belgian people and became a national hero. However 33 days later, on the 31st October 1830 he resigns from his position.

During a brief but important period in Belgian History he assumed a central role in the sphere of Politics. He was Belgium's first Prime-minister. He participated in the writing of the Belgian Constitution and inaugurated the national Congress in the name of the Belgian people.

CHAPTER 1: APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

This study strives to describe and analyse the political culture that was inherent to the neo-babouvist movement in Belgium in the 1830s. It is conducted through a rhetorical and pragmatic analysis of the written works of this movement, studying them in light of their inter-discursive, political and historical contexts. The body of this research is comprised of 400 revolutionary texts, which have not been re-published since the 1830s.

The research is situated at the crossroad between pragmatic and rhetoric studies on the one hand, and political philosophy and history on the other. Adopting a holistic approach to the historical and philosophical study of politics, inspired by Claude Lefort's and Pierre Rosanvallon's theories, it aims to re-construct the political and cultural *experience*, which is inherent to the Belgian neo-babouvisim, in a synchronic perspective. This is achieved by attempting to understand the manners in which the Belgian revolutionaries gave form and meaning to their political thought. It revolves around the notions of "mise en forme", "mise en sens" and "mise en scène" introduced by Claude Lefort. The methodological approach of this study elaborates some of the *New Rhetoric* and pragmatic instruments. It develops some of the models proposed by Marcelo Dascal, by adapting them to the specificity of political discourse.

It leans on three principal objectives which require a deeper political-rhetorical analysis: studying the rhetoric's morphology through a holistic approach; investigating the rhetoric's *dynamic*, the ways in which the political thought unfurls through the language; exploring the multiple interferences between rhetorical forms and political thought. In order to obtain these objectives, we propose to broaden the complete classical rhetorical analysis based on rhetorical intentional strategies,

by a study of its implicit and unconscious rhetorical forms, which are different from the declared intentions and sometimes opposed to them. We propose to designate the latter by the term rhetorical *mould*. We should stress that by "conscious/unconscious" we don't refer to the speaker's *real* meaning, but to a text artefact, to general organization principles which manage the relationship between the different textual elements. In order to reveal the real "point" of a political text, it seems important to confront the rhetorical-pragmatic analysis on the explicit rhetorical forms, by a study focused on its implicit elements.

An enlarged political-historical-pragmatic and rhetorical approach:

Following the perspective and some methodological principals developed by Marcelo Dascal I propose to develop them one step further.

In this chapter I will sum up (recapitulate) six methodological tools elaborated by Dascal and then I will present my suggestions:

1. **The importance of the controversy and the continuum:**
dialogue.....controversy.....dispute

M. Dascal proposes that controversy should be viewed on a spectrum which runs from dialogue, through controversy, to disputes. He insists on the fact that there is no dichotomy between them.

Dascal accords particular importance to the controversy, which he proposes to characterize by markers of opposition. In the controversy, there are polemical changes related to different, points of view, attitudes and affinities. At the end of the controversy, there is a possibility to decide by rational means, which is right (who is the winner)

2. **The context and the co-text**

While trying to interpret and to analyse a text, argue Dascal and Cremachki, one should take into account the historical context and the inter-discursive co-text. If we try to isolate the text from its inter-discursive co-text and from its historical context, we will fall into a false semantic reasoning, what Dascal entitles the "naïve semantics".

While most pragmaticians use a very limited interpretation of the context – reduced to some segmental basic date, as the time and the place of the scenario, Dascal and Cremaschki argue that the "the dialogical co-text is ESSENTIAL to

reconstruct the meaning of a text.” “Scientific works... can only be understood if properly contextualized.” ’

We are speaking about an enlarged and context (as opposed to segmental and punctual information)

In his researches lead with Elda Weizman, Dascal develops further the interpretation processes, which is not a linear one but a complex one. According to them the question is “to which difficulties is exposed the recipient and how he tries to resolve them.” The only way to avoid a false interpretation is to take into account **contextual elements as a whole.**

3. **Analyzing cycles of correspondence rather than isolated or limited texts**

Dascal and Cremaschki propose the study entire cycles of correspondence between Malthus and Ricardo (for instance the cycle of correspondence between June 1814 and January 1815).

They speak about “chunks of correspondence” (Ibid, p. 1132).

The researchers propose to study these chunks by alternating a **micro** level of analysis and a **macro** one. They incite the reader to be sensitive to the dynamic of the controversy. With this objective they propose to analyze the controversy between Malthus and Ricardo through what they call “moves and counter-moves”.

4. **Moves and counter-moves**

Dascal and Cremaschki explain that the differences between Malthus and Ricardo doesn’t result only from the clash between two different “casts of minds” or temperaments (Ibid, p.1131).

They believe that these differences result from a number of different factors that can and should be discerned through a careful analysis of the actual unfolding of the controversy.

The terms of moves and counter-moves are related to the controversial dynamic: a question requires a reply, an objection, a rebuttal (or concession etc.). “The relationship between moves and counter-moves shares with non-polemical dialogues the fact that each intervention in the exchange is performed in response to a ‘demand’ created by the preceding intervention.” (Ibid, p. 1131).

5. Two levels of analysis a micro level and a macro-level

In order to achieve a more in-depth and richer interpretation of the sequence of correspondence, the researchers propose to alternate between two levels of analysis: a micro level and a macro-level.

In the micro level the reader follows the dynamic of moves and counter-moves. He must be aware of not only what is said but also of the silences and inner-contradictions.

In the macro-level he looks for **patterns of argumentation**, mainly recurrent sequential moves, in order to get to an arsenal of stratagems. (Ibid, p.1147, 1151).

6. Roots metaphors

One of the most innovative aspects of Dascal and Cremaschki's methodology is the manner in which they propose to interpret the figurative language. As opposed to the traditional rhetoric, they claim that the author's style is inseparable from his character and his conception. Some of the metaphors he uses are revealing of the essence of his reasoning. They propose to use the term of *roots metaphors* to designate this type of metaphors, intrinsically related to the global orientation of his rhetoric's, the way in which the *rhetor* conceives and organizes his movements, in order to achieve his objectives. In other words, the roots metaphors reveal the cohesion of his discourse, its profound cohesion.

Now, let me present **my suggestions** for each element explained before:

1. the continuum: dialogue.....controversy.....dispute

On the continuum dialogue-controversy-dispute what seem important to me is the process through which a dialogue becomes a dispute. I am interested more specifically on the reversal from a discourse of progress to a reactionary one. Actually this kind of reversal happens very often in politics when the patterns speak about peace, for instance, but some inner force in them pushes them to a rigid and conservative discourse.

2. The context and the co-text

I propose to further broaden Dascal's definition of *context* while applying it to a political discourse. When we try to understand the *historical experience*, which is

inherent to a philosophical movement, we should take into account the **on-going interaction** between diverse elements which participate in the creation of a political culture, such as the History of a state (the history understood as an historical *experience*, more than as a succession of events), its Constitution, its political establishments, political practices, conceptions and values).

Furthermore, the context includes not only explicit elements, but also **implicit ones, such as presumptions and taboos.**

Leaders are not always sensitive to the implicit elements of their partner while dealing with a negotiation process. Consequently, a lot of political negotiations implode at the very beginning (I would like to say, before they start).

To reiterate my suggestion, I am speaking of a broader context, a dynamic one and a changing one, composed of explicit and implicit elements.

3. The two levels of analysis: micro and macro

I propose to introduce between the two levels an intermediate one. This intermediate level is the process through which the actors (the revolutionaries in this case) give shape and meaning to their rhetorical forms of expression. We are interested in rhetoric, in rhetorical strategies but also in verbal forms the actors use unconsciously. The intermediate level of giving meaning plays a central role in the creation of new nations and national communities, as in the case of Belgium in 1830. The dialogue then turns around the definition of the terms.

4. Analyzing cycles of correspondence rather than isolated or limited texts

The corpus of this study consists of a long sequence: the whole political Belgian writings published between 1830 and 1839. It is based also about the whole political French writings published at the same period. The French writings will give us a comparative perspective. Some other political writings of other revolutionaries in Europe are taken into account, mainly writings edited and published in Europe.

While analyzing a very long sequence (400 political writings published through a decade), I propose to use three principal questions: Which rhetorical and pragmatic forms appear frequently in the whole of the Belgian neo-babouvistic writing? Which sense is associated with these forms in the neo-babouvistic writing? How can these forms be interpreted within the historical context and through the pragmatic analysis.

5. Moves and counter-moves

The dynamic between moves and counter-moves is even more complex. Actually counter-moves appear not only between two people, but within the thought process of each of them. The Reasoning and the verbal expression rarely progress in a linear way but through waves. We could compare them to the knight movements in the chess (two steps forward and one step sideways). I am referring to inner counter-moves not on a psychological level, which while interesting is beyond the scope of our research, but on a linguistic level, which is rooted in the words.

6. *Root metaphors and rhetorical moulds*

I propose to further enlarge Dascal's term "root metaphors" and to speak on the one hand about (voluntary) root metaphors and on the other, on rhetorical moulds.

Among the rhetorical moulds those which appear frequently play a central role. They actually function as a mine sweeper.

For instance, the oxymoron forms in the Belgian revolutionary discourse of 1830, is a detector of the Belgian ambivalent position to their own political revolution. In other words, the oxymoronic forms are situated at the turning point from a revolutionary progressive discourse, to a stagnant one.

WHAT IS THE PARADOXE IN PRAGMATIC TERMS?

According to Marcelo Dascal a paradox is a statement to which we can't accord a value of truth.

In her book *Paradoxes*¹, Anat Biletzki claims that a paradox is an argument (a statement) which includes probable presumptions and which leads us, through probable modes of reasoning and implications, to a conclusion which seems to us improbable.

¹ . Annat Biletzki, *Paradoxes* (in hebreu), Tel-Aviv, 1996, p.18.

To clarify these presumptions, the modes of reasoning and the implication **seem probable. They appear to be probable.**

Biletski insists on the fact that the paradox contains an inherent contradiction: “the paradox differs from the doxa by a particular and surprising mode. The paradox contains an obvious or a real contradiction. It ‘proves’ something we have the conviction of being false. For this reason, the reader (or the listener) of the paradox is surprised.

The researcher makes the distinction between different kinds of paradoxes. The *paradoxes of facts* concern the physical world the movement and the space (such as Zenon's the paradox of Achilles and the tortoise). The *illogisms* are paradoxes where the contradiction is in the statement (“It rains and it doesn’t rain”). *Paradoxes of rationality* present us with rational dilemmas and rational choices. *Pragmatic paradoxes* result from our (in)capacity of what we pretend being able to do.

Between oxymorons and paradoxes

It seems to me that there are at least three essential differences between oxymorons and paradoxes:

Condensation/ abstraction – The oxymoron appears in a condensed form and is primarily a linguistic feature, while the paradox functions on an abstract level. It is related to the development of ideas or of principles.

Association/ dissociation – In the paradox, the emphasis is on the insoluble nature of the problem, on the logical tensions. In contrast, the oxymoron creates from two irreconcilable elements, a new and unexpected sense. It results in a fusion. Yet, this fusion is presented as an enigma.

Pure reason/ a complex experience – The paradox is purely rational. It is based on logic, while the oxymoron implies a jump from the rational to a complex experience, which includes sentiment and imagination. The oxymoron interpretation requires a transition from a rational level, where contradiction can’t exist, to an experience where ideological tensions, inner contradictions and ambivalences are an inherent part of its nature.

CHAPTER TWO: A CLOSE UP READING OF THE PRIMES MINSITER’S LETTER OF RESIGNATION

THE EXPLICITE RHETORIC OF THE DOCUMENT

The explicit rhetoric of the *Letter to my fellow citizens aims to reveal that the Belgian revolutionaries' balance of reason* ("Lets weigh up the pros and the cons of the revolution before starting it") is actually a paradoxical balance, the source of their failure to act. De Potter describes this phenomenon - and then analyses its causes with perceptiveness. No politician in Belgium in 1830 was more profound, almost prophetic than Louis De Potter.

In all his revolutionaries writings, from the *Letter to my fellow citizens* to his *Coup d'oeil rétrospectif* about the Belgian revolution published in 1858, De Potter reproaches the Belgian people for their "staggering (retracted) revolution" ("révolution escamotée"). His criticism is exceptional in its radicalism: it is neither by an external obstacle, nor by a bad management that he explains the failure of the Belgian revolution. According to the Prime-minister the problem is the profound inability of the Belgian people to act, in other words the lack of revolutionary spirit in the country: " [...] the revolution dragged on slowly. It quickly became unpopular. It was wasting away and was about to vanish without results".² When Louis De Potter published his letter, in November 1830, he believed that, in spite of the differences between him and the Belgian people, the revolution could be revived. According to him, the solution for Belgium was "the return of the revolution, this terrible remedy applied to the evils of the society". "The most sacred duty (of the citizens) is to reverse the abuses of all times with the persons who suffer from these abuses."³ He proposes that one should "push away the force by a force" and one should "consider as an enemy any so-called mediator, who violates Belgian soil and who make an attempt to the national sovereignty"⁴ He reproaches the "new rulers" (« nouveaux maîtres ») having scarified Belgian independence and having betrayed the people: "I understood that the same people remained at the head of the state; that the people were once more erased."⁵

² . « [...] la révolution se trahait lentement ; se dépopularisoit de jour en jour ; se consumoit elle-même, et menaçoit de s'évanouir sans résultat. » *Lettre à mes concitoyens*, op.cit., p. 5.

³ . The two citations in French: « le retour de la révolution, ce terrible remède appliqué aux maux de la société. » *Révolution belge 1829-1839 : Souvenirs personnels*, op. cit, p. 138.

"[...] le retour de la révolution, ce terrible remède appliqué aux maux de la société." *De la révolution à faire d'après l'expérience des révolutions avortées*, Paris, Ladvocat, déc. 1831,

⁴ . In French: « [...] que l'on repousse la force par la force et qu'on traitera en ennemi tout prétendu médiateur qui violerait le sol belge et attendrait à la souveraineté nationale. » *Y aura-t-il une Belgique* (Bruxelles, H.I.G. François, 1838).

⁵ « "J'ai compris que les mêmes hommes étoient restés sur la tête des affaires ; que le peuple étoit de nouveau effacé." *Ibid*, p. 11.

During the decade between 1830 and 1839 and during his exile, De Potter had an even more lucid and profound vision of the shortcomings of his compatriots. He highlights the Belgians' weak points: "easy going" (soft spirited), "phantasmagoria of passive obedience", the importance they accord to the material comforts, comfort which he calls "the worship of the golden calf" and above all the lack of voluntarism or of "revolutionary flame". To summarise his point of view he says that the pendular movement of the *balance of reason* could be compared to the "convulsive movements of a galvanism"⁶. Thus, he unmasked the essential paradox of the Belgian revolution: a balance of reason⁷ which becomes a balance of death.

What actually is the revolutionary conception of Louis De Potter? I propose to examine this through the *mise en scene* of 3 topics: revolutions of 1830, political and social revolution, Republic:

The revolution of 1830: Louis De Potter, unlike his compatriots who wished for an autonomus status, wanted revolution. He "had a determined idea of this revolution. He had conceived a project and an objective."⁸ He tried to incite a revolution, but his compatriots had forced him into inaction. De Potter didn't want to be authoritarian so he renounced his project: "My least idea was to push Belgium into a war of independence." (Ibid, p.16). This divergence in ideas explains the different rhetoric each of them chooses. De Potter interprets persuasion as an incitement to act. His compatriots, on the other hand, believe that to persuade means to try to change the opinion of the adversary.

Taking into account this difference, De Potter renounced his project and submitted himself to waiting. Consequently, the *mise en scene* of the Belgian revolution was according to the scheme of the Belgian rhetoric, and more specifically the use of the conditional sentence of the past: "During my brief stay in Lille and in Valenciennes, the forth memorable days of Bruxelles could had token place." What is De Potter's position to this situation? It is rather an ambiguous one. He observes them critically, criticising their inaction, but he also shares their wish to be liberated from Dutch oppression.

⁶ . *Y aura-t-il une Belgique?*, *op. cit.*, p. 25, 30.

⁷ . See: M. Dascal, "Argument, war and the role of the media in conflict management," *Jews and Muslims in modern media*, ed. T. Partiff, London, Curzon Press, 2001.

. *Y aura-t-il une Belgique?*, *op. cit.*, p. 25, 30

⁸ . Il s'était « formé sur elle une idée déterminée, conçu un plan et supposé un but ». *Lettre à mes concitoyens*, *op. cit.*, p. 16, note.

Political revolution and social revolution: According to De Potter, the political revolution should not be separated from the social revolution: “I have said that the revolution made by the people must be completely to their benefit” (Ibid, p.25, note).

Thus the resignation of the Prime-minister is presented as a natural consequence of the way in which the revolution of 1830 proceeded and of the choice of a monarchic regime: “I felt that my efforts [...] had been of no use to the cause of the people and of the republic.” (Ibid, p.35). But what exactly was this revolution? What were its foundations? “The people that we are, we are thanks to you; what we do, we do through you”⁹ – the epigraph poses the principle of the popular sovereignty as the foundation of all representative regimes. The author links this principle with the idea of a successful the revolution: “the economy is for the people the net product of their revolution. It should be to the benefit of the lower classes” (p.15).

Nevertheless, De Potter remains laconic when speaking about the nature of his project. This topic is largely discussed in *The revolution which is needed*¹⁰. According to Potter the revolution is the direct result of the oppression. But, when it breaks out it has its own force. Revolution is personified just as it is by Victor Hugo in *Les Misérables*. De Potter explains: “to make the social revolution is to reform the society interest of the people, so that the people could maintain this reform by themselves and for themselves”.¹¹

How can we ensure it? De Potter is opposed to the idea of a regulator State (Etat régulateur) and he is critical of this kind of politics in France. As an alternative he adopts the politics of *laissez faire*, found in the liberalism of counter-balance. By this he is inspired by Anglo-Saxon models, and distances himself from the French models.

⁹ . The epigraph in French: « peuple que nous sommes, nous le sommes par vous; ce que nous ferons nous le ferons par vous » :

¹⁰ . Louis De Potter, *De la révolution à faire d'après l'expérience des révolutions avortées* (Paris : Librairie Ladvocat, décembre 1831).

¹¹ . *De la révolution à faire, op. cit.*, p. 22.

The idea of social and political revolution seems inspired by a famous text, written by the founder of the neo-babouviste movement in Europe, **Buonarroti**. The text is the *Conspiracy of Equals (le Manifeste des Egaux)*.¹²

Before speaking about this source of inspiration, let me start by talking about the relation between De Potter and Buonarroti: De Potter had direct contact with Buonarroti from 1824. He received Buonarroti in Belgium. He helped him to publish the famous *Conspiration des Egaux dite de Babeuf*. The two men were very close. And yet they had ideological difference mainly on the Belgian issue. Buonarroti believed that Belgium could easily become an important centre of the revolutions in Europe. For this reason he sent Charles Teste to Belgium to organise the secret societies there and to try to influence important political figures at that time (such as Charles Rogier, Ducpatiaux, Lucien Jottrand). De Potter, from the very beginning, is very sceptical about the possibility that it could lead to a real revolution in Belgium. We will come to their discussion later on.

Let us return to the *Manifeste des Egaux*. According to Buonarroti, the **associations** are the main means by which the working class can liberate itself. Buonarroti himself is inspired by the *Social Contract* of Rousseau, in order to proclaim the right of the associations and their function: to battle the order based on egoism. According to Buonarroti it's the associations which enable the political revolution: the installation of a republic through a social revolution. By calling on the workers to gather, he is inspired by the model of association de G. Babeuf. In this context, violating the law is considered as legitimate when the Power has betrayed the sovereignty of the people and the Constitution of 1793 (the most egalitarian in France).

The Republic: Louis De Potter proclaims his republican project several times in his *Letter*. There is an interesting play between the text and the notes: an allusion in the text and then a long digression in the sub-text. This game between the theme and its variations rise to a crescendo as the *Letter* progresses, culminating in the last note: "[...] as a simple citizen, my principles are well known. I am democratic. I have never hidden it."¹³

How to justify this controversial idea in Belgium in 1830? De Potter's arguments are based on a unique synthesis between contemporary themes in

¹² . About the important role played by Buonarroti in Belgium and about another famous text of him, see: Bernard Dandois, Philippe Buonarroti, sur la forme républicaine à donner au gouvernement belge (Bruxelles : Aden, 2013).

¹³ . The republican idea also appears in pages 26, 27, 28, 30, 35-36. It also appears seven times in the Appendix, p.41.

French political writings of this period and some stereotypes about the qualities of the Belgian people.

«Believing that the republic was the best form of government, I was obliged to try to establish one in Belgium [...] I demonstrated that it was necessary among a worker population, of simple manners, rich, without great differences of fortune, and having a moderate character, not used either to exaltation, or to exaggeration. » (*Ibid*, p. 24-25.)

In French: «Croyant la république le meilleur des gouvernements possibles, je devois chercher à la réaliser en Belgique [...] je prouvois qu'elle étoit nécessairement chez un peuple laborieux, de mœurs simples, riche sans grande inégalité de fortune, et d'un caractère peu porté à l'exaltation et à l'exagération. »

« I have said that the revolution created by the people had to be entirely to their benefit. This can be achieved only after giving them back the power to nominate the judges (magistrates), we should introduce a tax system which really benefits the people [...] Otherwise there can be no possible economy under the monarchy. So, no more Monarchy. No more succession.» (*Ibid*, p. 25, note).

In French : « J'ai dit que la révolution faite par le peuple devoit tourner tout entière au profit du peuple : cela aura lieu, et ne peut avoir lieu que, lorsqu'après lui avoir rendu la nomination de ses magistrats, on aura fixé l'assiette vraiment populaire des impôts [...] Or, point d'économie possible sous la royauté. Donc, point de royauté. C'est-à-dire point d'hérédité. »

In this examples we can see two arguments frequently used in French republican and socialist writings to which the author adds a third argument which is an amalgamation of French and Belgian arguments and finally a "Belgian" argument: 1) On should adopt the republican regime in the name of social justice; 2) The republican regime is the less expensive one; 3) The republican regime is the only conceivable option in Belgium in 1830. What is interesting is the *mise en scene* of this argument: based on the presumption of Montesquieu that the form of the regime must be correlated to the material conditions of the people, to their social institutions and their customs, De Potter invests it with stereotypes of the qualities of the Belgian people ("worker, of simple manners, not used either to exaltation, or to exaggeration"). He deduces from these a conclusion which was almost unthinkable in Belgium at this time (the choice of the republican regime in Belgium); 4) By choosing the republican regime Belgium would become a model country. This last argument concerns the external image of Belgium: "physically weak as a monarchy we could become strong, from a moral point of view, as a republic. We should be respected, venerated, as a *model country* [...]."

The controversy between Louis De Potter and his compatriots was deep rooted. The question was who would decide on the nature of the regime? Most of the members of the provisional Government thought that Congress should decide. On the other hand, Louis De Potter thought that in times of war, the government should decide. In other words, under exceptional circumstances, the legislative power must be subordinated to the executive power. This last point leads us to the next issue of our study.

CHAPTER 3: THE IMPLICIT LEVEL OF DE POTTERS DISCOURSE

The implicit level of De Potter's discourse goes against the (ex) Prime-minister's explicit statements. In other words, if the Prime-minister claims that: I am a democratic Belgian revolutionary. I am a progressive liberal, while you, my people, are trapped by your own revolutionary paradoxes; his discourse contains an incitement to a dictatorial regime. The slide from the neo-babouviste model of the controversy to a dispute model now undergoes a second transformation: from a dispute to a paradox. When this occurs, De Potter's liberal, democratic and republican thoughts become anti-liberal, anti-democratic and anti-republican.

How can we illustrate this reversed position?

In later writing of De Potter, published during 1850 the anti-democratic position is explicit. De Potter tired by the lack of revolutionary spirit in his people, says that: "If the Belgian people are not yet prepared for their independence and a democratic and republican regime, they should live in an ultra-royalist regime."

This position also appears in the apparently innocent resignation letter, published in 1830. It can be revealed by careful reading of the notes of the letter and the reference to famous texts of his period, mainly the references to Buonarroti and to Louis Auguste Blanqui's writings.

I will limit this part of the article to the micro-analysis of one significant sequence of the famous letter. Afterwards, there will be a more general discussion of the relations between the Belgian Prime-minister and the Frenchman Louis Auguste Blanqui, famous for his guerrilla conception. I have chosen Blanqui because his influence is the most conspicuous in De Potter's writings, even though De Potter doesn't mention his name.

The incitement to the dictatorial regime – first example:

The idea advocated by Louis De Potter is that the Belgian revolution (of 1830) should be saved through a dictatorial regime and by starting a war against the Netherlands. The word “dictatorship” doesn’t appear in the text, but the idea does appear indirectly, in the choice of certain expressions as well as in activation of a system of references:

“The government had neither an opinion, nor a colour, neither a system nor a character. Consequently the government was condemned to die.

Being supported by my friend Tielemans, I was the only one, in the central commission, who wanted the government define itself politically. I wanted it to choose a position. I wished it because, in my opinion, we were the real representatives of the revolution and the duty to overcome the obstacles and to prepare its triumph was imposed on us; because, if we left it to a future Congress, who’s opinions and character were unknown to us, the mission to decide blindly the fate of our homeland, would be a very imprudent, and it would probably have been a great mistake; because in fact we were still in a state of revolution, and by leaving it to the Congress to establish in a lawful manner, through the promulgation of a fundamental law and the determination of an executive power, one should, while waiting for this Congress, govern in one sense or another, in spirit or a defined way, knowing that congress has only to ratify the actions of the revolution and to establish its principals and its doctrines” (*Lettre à mes concitoyens, op.cit.*, p.15)

[In French: “Le gouvernement n’avoit plus d’opinion, plus de couleur, et par conséquent plus de caractère ni de système, le gouvernement étoit frappé de mort.

Soutenu par mon ami Tielemans, j’étois le seul au comité central à vouloir qu’il se dessinât politiquement, qu’un mot il prît parti. Je le voulois, parce qu’à mes yeux nous étions les véritables représentants de révolution, et qu’à nous étoit imposé le devoir de la faire triompher de tous les obstacles et de préparer son triomphe; parce qu’en abandonnant au congrès futur, dont les opinions et le caractère nous étoient inconnus, le soin de décider en quelque sorte aveuglement le sort de la patrie, eut été dans tous les cas une grande imprudence, et que ce seroit probablement une faute irréparable; parce qu’enfin nous étions toujours en révolution, et que, tout en confiant au congrès la mission de nous rentrer dans les voies légales par la promulgation d’une loi fondamentale et la détermination d’un pouvoir exécutif, encore fallait-il, en attendant ce même congrès, avoir gouverné dans un sens ou dans un autre, dans un esprit ou dans un système arrêté, plus que la représentation nationale n’eut qu’à ratifier les actes de la révolution et à constituer ses principes et ses doctrines. » (*Ibid*, p. 15).

What actually was Louis De Potter’s political project? This paragraph is characterized by the rhetoric of suspense and camouflaging. Some syntactic and lexical choices create this effect:

Firstly, we can see the absence of balance between, on one hand, a long list of subordinate clauses (of cause and of objective) and on the other, two short principal propositions (“I was the only one ... who wanted...”; “I wanted it”). Actually, the author speaks more about his motivations than on the nature of his choices. This heaviness of the syntax attracts our attention given that De Potter’s

style is generally clear and straightforward. Secondly, the author obscures the object of the verb “wanted”. He says less about his concrete political plans. After the first preposition, we wait for the verb’s direct object (‘to want the republic regime’ for instance), but we are instead faced with two subordinate clauses in which the semantics are very vague: What does De Potter mean by “to define itself politically” or “to choose a position”. The repetition of the verb “to want” in the next sentence reinforces the mystery: “I wanted it...” In this kind of sentences, when we use the pronoun “it”, the object of the pronoun is normally defined in the previous sentence, but in this case nothing is clear. It is through a game of ‘hide-and-seek’ that the author introduces his revolutionary ideas.

Let us look at the semantics. First, the word “dictatorship” doesn’t appear explicitly in the text. Nevertheless, the idea is suggested by a series of expressions: “...we were the real representatives of the revolution and the duty to overcome the obstacles and to prepare its triumph was imposed on us”; ‘we were still in a state of revolution, and by leaving it to the Congress to establish in a lawful manner [...] one should, govern [...] in one sense or another...”

These terms revive a revolutionary imagery known to the Belgian and to the French revolutionaries of this period. They refer not only to the French Revolution, but also to two famous texts of their time: the *Project for a Republican Constitution* of Charles Testeⁱ and the *Conspiracy of Equals as described by Babeuf* – the famous text published by Buonarroti. It is through a series of references that a picture of the French Revolution and the Terror appears.

Examining De Potters strategies of disguise in the context of the Belgian political culture of his period we get the impression that there was no place for the idea of a coup d’État or a dictatorial regime. The very concept of “political revolution” in the classical sense of the term could hardly be expressed there. Thus, relations between the Belgian people and the “revolution” is very complicated.

The implicit level of De Potter’s discourse goes against the explicit statements of the (ex) Prime-minister. In other terms, if the Prime-minister claims: I am a democratic Belgian revolutionary. I am a progressive liberal, while you, my people, are tracked by your own revolution paradoxes; his discourse contains a reversal to an incitement to a dictatorial regime. The sliding from the neo-babouviste model of the controversy to a dispute model now undergoes a second transformation: from a dispute to a paradox. While dispute becomes a paradox, the liberal, democratic and republican thought of De Potter becomes anti-liberal, anti-democratic and anti-republican.

How could we reveal this reversal?

In later writings of De Potter, published during the 1850th the anti-democratic position is explicit. De Potter tired by less of revolutionary spirit of his people, claims (says): “If the Belgian people is not yet prepared to its independence and to a democratic and republic regime, he should live in an ultra-royalist regime.”

This voice appears also in the apparently innocent letter of demission, edited in 1830. We could rather revel (under mask) it by reading carefully the notes of the letter and the reference to famous texts of his period, mainly the references to Buonarroti and to Louis Auguste Blanqui’s writings.

I will delimit this part of the article to the micro-analysis of one significant sequence of the famous letter. Afterwards, there will be general discussion about the relations between the French Prime-minister and the French Louis Auguste Blanqui, famous by his guerrilla conception. I have chosen Blanqui because his inspiration is the most present in De Potters writings, even though De Potter doesn’t mention his name.

Second example:

The second extract dedicated to the dictatorship is more explicit. Let us examine the beginning. In order to make the analysis easier, I have numbered the rhetorical sequences:

« 1) Considering the provisional Government as the real driving-force of the revolution, I wanted to confide to this government the mission of creating stable foundations for the revolution, the mission to establish this revolution, to outline in advance the way in which I would have been allowed, to set the revolution on a path from which it could not later be diverted ; 2) I have considered myself as appointed (assigned)set to establish the republic. 3) And in my opinion, the Congress convened (convoked) to regulate, to legalize, in one word to constitute (make up) and to *certify* the revolution already made, already achieved by the government, in order to organise the republic, to expose as *rights* [...] the *facts* of the revolution [...] 4) It was the only measure to do right and to do quickly » (*Ibid*, p. 30).

In French:

« 1) Considérant le Gouvernement provisoire comme la véritable motrice de la révolution, j’avois voulu confier à ce gouvernement seul la mission d’asseoir la révolution sur des bases inébranlables, la mission de fixer cette révolution, de tracer à l’avance la voie dont il m’auroit été permis, dont il n’auroit plus été possible qu’elle sortît ; 2) je m’étois regardé moi-même comme appelé à établir la république. 3) Et selon moi, le congrès uniquement convoqué pour régulariser, pour légaliser, en un mot pour constituer, et, pour ainsi dire, *constater*, la révolution déjà faite,

déjà achevée par le gouvernement, pour organiser la république [...] à exposer comme des *droits* [...] les *faits* de la révolution [...] 4) c'étoit le seul moyen de faire vite et de faire bien. » (*Ibid*, p. 30).

Let us come back to the Belgian revolution. The initial balance presented by Louis De Potter is clear. It opposes the Dutch government, a strong and absolute regime, and the revolutionary forces which aim to liberate the Belgian people and put in place new government, that of the Belgian *unionists* (*Catholics and liberals independent Belgian forces*). The unionist forces are designated by the pronoun "us". Thus, Justice is on the side of the resistance to the strong foreign (Dutch) power, which "rushes upon the ones and the others" [in French: "court sus aux uns et aux autres) (*Ibid*, p.14). The choice of the formula: "one should A or B" illustrates the fact that the balance contains one point of reference: "It is essential that from two options one will prevail. Either that society will accept to submit to the arbitrary power [...] or that it will proclaim its support for all freedom of opinion." (*Ibid*, p.8)

[In French: « Il faut nécessairement de deux choses l'une : ou que la société se range sous l'arbitraire du pouvoir [...] ou bien qu'elle proclame et maintient la liberté de toutes les opinions. »

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I will conclude this example by summarising the justifications for the dictatorial regime advanced by Louis De Potter. The author founds his argument on the principle of the sovereignty of the people and on their right to insurrection defined by Rousseau's *Social Contract*. He refers to the notion of transitional dictatorship, recognized by any reader of Buonarroti and of Charles Antoine Teste. On this basic principal, De Potter links "local" (Belgian) arguments: 1) taking into account the dangers resulting from leaving all three powers in the hands of the Congress, which is *Organist* (royalist and Netherlands), a temporary supremacy of the provisional Government seems necessary.

2) the maintaining of power by the dictatorial government seems even more necessary given that a future government would be opposed to the very spirit of the revolution. Under these circumstances, one should resort to drastic measures. In short, the dictatorial regime appears as a survival measure.

Louis De Potter and Auguste Blanqui

Before speaking about the affinities and the differences between the Belgian Prime-minister, Louis De Potter, and the famous French revolutionary, Auguste Blanqui, let me very briefly introduce Louis De Potter....

The affinities between Louis De Potter and Auguste Blanqui

Insurrection – the incarnation of the popular sovereignty

The strength

The classes' war

The divergences between Louis De Potter and Auguste Blanqui

The attitude towards rhetoric

The attitude toward religion

Conclusion: an investigation of the meeting between Louis De Potter and Auguste Blanqui

What is the dynamic of the affinities between Louis De Potter and Auguste Blanqui? Is their ideological similarity a pure coincidence, two parallel voyages of two thinkers who acted independently, without knowing each other? Or is there a direct influence of one of them on the other? And if the second is the case, was it Blanqui who influenced De Potter or the other way round?

It is hard to get a definitive answer on these questions...

The influence of the Belgian political culture on De Potter and the syncretism between the French Blanquism and the Belgian political culture of 1830.

Even though De Potter admires the French revolutionary culture, he insists on what he calls his "belgitude" ("I am Belgian!").

His position at the intersection of two political cultures, the Belgian one and the French one, ends up in a rhetorical form of syncretism. I propose to examine this syncretism through 3 topics:

The representation of the nation: The nation is represented by De Potter as an organic one (a form found in a French reactionary thinker – Michelet).

Rhetoric – De Potter considers rhetoric as the main measure of the revolutionary action. His understanding of rhetoric is very different from the French one. Rhetoric is not an arm of a war, but a measure of persuasion.

The 'mise en scene' of the Belgian values

The third characteristics by which De Potter is inspired by the Belgian culture is the respect of **liberalism, of unionism between liberals and Catholics in Belgium of 1830 of and of tolerance, which is the keystone (cle de voute) of the Belgian unionism.**

CONCLUSION:

DE POTTER'S IRREVERSIBLE DEFEAT

The letter '*To my fellow citizens*' didn't achieve its objectives. Louis De Potter will be forever seen as guilty. He was blacklisted by his people. "You will spoil everything by your presence", one of his most intimate friends told him, "your arrival will put an end to the negotiations and will be a declaration of war; we will lose in one second the fruits of our long prudence and of our painful work."

Confined to act behind the scenes, he ended by disappearing. From then on, all his efforts to re-establish a dialogue with his compatriots were in vain.

Which are the reasons for the sudden fall of the Belgian first Prime minister?

It is a tough question for the politician who has irrevocably fallen from power and a delicate one for the philosophers and historians **trying to understand the fall of a political leader.**

De Potter's explanation:

While editing his letter of resignation, De Potter feels that his voice is a "cry in the desert". He considers his audience, the Belgian people, as paralyzed by fright and deaf to the prophetic voice of their leader. I would say that what is correct in this interpretation is that in 1830, when De Potter writes his famous letter, its content is completely inconceivable. Only 9 years later, in the summer of 1839, when the Belgian people faced the danger of losing Limbourg and Luxembourg, would they will become radical.

Was it simply a gap between a pioneer and his generation? This was the Belgian ex-Prime-minister's opinion: "I was wrong by being right too soon", he said in his letter to King Guillaume.

Thus, in a paradoxical way [and here we have another paradox..] when De Potter finally returned to his homeland, he is more irrevocably exiled than before.

The explanation of his neo-babouviste fellows

Another explanation is given by De Potter's fellow Adolphe Bartels (an important member of the neo-babouvist movement). Bartels was a liberal and he often assumed the role of a mediator or judge: "For the moment, Brussels is not as advanced as Paris in the republican issue." In other words, De Potter tries to introduce the Belgian people to ideas, which they couldn't accept because they were not yet ready for them.

According to this interpretation, it was the *global orientation* of the Prime-minister's rhetoric which was questioned by De Potter's fellow. In other words, the *strategy* was not adapted to his people, he was not in-tune with his audience.

The historians' interpretation

Two famous historians of the 20th century, Galante-Garonne and Kuypers, explain even more clearly the gap between a "naive and idealist" thinker, and a politician confronted with a political reality". The thinker couldn't realise his ideas and as a result, became profoundly disillusioned and isolated from politics and retired into his writing. After publishing his famous letter, De Potter is politically a lost person. He will explain his frustration and anger by apocalyptic visions about the fate of his country.

Our enlarged pragmatic -political interpretation

There is no doubt that De Potter made some strategic and rhetorical mistakes. Instead of persuading his countrymen, he aroused their anger. **But why was there such an insurmountable wall between the orator and his public? What was the cause of such resentment on both sides?** Instead of looking at the arguments, we should closely examine the political and cultural **presumptions** of Louis De Potter and of his audience. When De Potter publishes his letter, in the winter of 1830, the clash between the French revolutionary culture and the Belgian one is particularly hard.

De Potter was rejected by the Belgian people because unconsciously and involuntarily he replaced one paradox (the balance of reason turned into a balance

of immobility) by another one – trying to impose a violent revolution model on a liberal and non-violent culture.

His dramatic failure, is the result of not only, the contradiction between his way of thinking and his action, but emerges from a paradox in his way of thinking

It is through an in-depth pragmatic analysis of his letter that we can bring to the surface the deeper reasons for his failure.

Louis De Potter, the Philosopher and the Politician, went against the trend of the Belgian political culture of his period. His positions, his actions and his rhetoric break the taboos of Belgium in 1830. De Potters intransigent attitude and his cry for a violent revolution, challenged the local political culture, based on a pluralist liberalism as much as on the ideas of transaction and of non-violence. The Prime minister's failure is one of a Philosopher who didn't know how to translate his thinking into action. But what appears to be a contradiction between theoretical thinking and political practice, or between a profession of faith and political practice, turned out to be an inherent contradiction in his thinking. The contrast between the theory and the practice stand out, the cracks in his revolutionary thinking, its ambiguities, its inner contradictions and **paradoxes**, reveal themselves through the analysis of the *mise en forme* [if we use Claude Lefort terminology] of its thinking and dynamics.

Louis De Potter couldn't exist, in the political culture of his time, without these ideological tensions. His attempt to impose the French Revolutionary model on the Belgian people, seemed to be unavoidable (especially given the stagnation of the political revolution in Belgium), but as an **impossible** one.

His defeat cannot be explained by either his temper or his tactics. The sudden failure [*fracas*] of De Potter results from the lack of correlation between the Blanquist model that he tried to transport, and the presumptions of political-culture of his countrymen.

Louis De Potter wasn't sensitive enough to the foundations of his dialogue. Trying to reanimate the Belgian revolution through French radicalism, he made the mistake of the de-contextualisation.

The Belgium's first Prime-minister didn't take into account the circumstances. He didn't know how to adapt his action as the sophist's *kairos* requires. As a result, while the Belgian Prime minister gained some popularity in France, his popularity and prestige in Belgium soon dropped dramatically.

Does this mean that every Political Revolution contains a seed of the Terror? In Belgium, De Potter is one of the rare thinkers and politician who believed in this

connection. Nevertheless, in the Belgian political culture of 1830, the link between Revolution and Terror was unthinkable.

Conclusion: From the Belgian case to some political and pragmatic reflexions:

On a more general level, the Belgian *case study*, illustrates the contribution of pragmatic analysis to political and historical research.

The question is whether we are able to see what exists for a long time in embryonic form surface only later on. For instance, to detect a contradiction which will become a paradox

In other words, will we be able to anticipate a Gordian knot in political negotiation at its very beginning or, even better, before it even starts.

The issue is to try to understand the inner ambiguities, contradictions and paradoxes, which at their source are not a result of a disparity between politicians with opposing positions or conceptions – who, as Dascal stated, will express themselves through the dynamics of moves and counter-moves - but rather the contradictions within each of them. Contradictions, of which the principles themselves are often unaware, and which appear on an implicit level in their discourse.

Being sensitive to these inner counter-moves will enable us to understand how a controversy becomes a dispute even before negotiation has started (because of these paradoxes)

If a *root metaphor* can reveal the global orientation of a discourse, its profound cohesion, as proposed Dascal and Cremascki, I would suggest, that it can also reveal its profound contradictions and paradoxes.

From an historical and political perspective, we can see how a political experience arise both as a horizon and as an abysse [Rosanvallon: “une expérience politique se pose d’emblée comme un horizon et comme un gouffre”, p.81]

I would like to close by quoting an interesting conversation between the leader of the neo-babouvist movement in Europe, Buonarroti and De Potter. The conversation occurred just before the start of the national revolution in Belgium.

The discussion between Buonarroti and De Potter

Buonarroti, the restless veteran revolutionary tries to persuade De Potter to act in favour of a political and social revolution in his country.

De Potter, mobilise himself. He organises the publication of Buonarroti's book *De manifeste des Egaux* and assumes a central role in the revolutionary forces. Nevertheless, he is from the very beginning sceptical about the chances of success for a revolution in Belgium: "I don't expect anything from it, not because I think it is too early or too late, but because I can't see how it could be appropriate [*a propos*]. It would be yet another book for those who read, which means a minority, and then *things will go on as before.*"

The term De Potter uses "*a propos*" express precisely the incompatibility between the Belgian political cultural of his time and the revolutionary practice.

With the passing of time, in the polemic between Buonarroti and De Potter, the late was right. His analysis of the pitfalls of the Belgian revolutionary culture, surprise us by its perceptiveness. Nevertheless, his argument should be corrected.

It was not a neglected minority who read Buonarroti. Actually, a quarter of the Belgian Congress members were affiliated to the neo-babouviste movement.

Buonarroti's dictatorial idea inspired the "provisional government" in Belgium. But this provisional government was short-lived (from the 10th November 1830, until the 26th February 1831). As to the *secret societies*, when Buonarroti asks its members to start a war against the foreign oppressor (King Guillaume), they seem hesitant, reluctant and too tired.

What can we say about the first Prime-minister of Belgium on the perspective of time? Nobody was more intelligent, or had more insight than Louis De Potter on understanding the essential paradoxes of the Belgian revolution. However, nobody has been blinder than him as to the concrete outcome of the revolution.

