

## PREFACE

The initial versions of the contributions to this volume were presented at a colloquium organized by the Centre for the Study of Pre-Industrial Production Processes and Labour Relations (PIPA; director: Hugo Soly) of the *Vrije Universiteit Brussel*, Free University of Brussels, and the Flemish Centre for the Study of Popular Culture (VCV; director: Marc Jacobs), Brussels, in December 2000. Dr Jacobs thought of convening the participants in the Landcommanderij Alden Biesen at Bilzen, Belgium. This proved a flash of inspiration, as these surroundings were truly magnificent, both in historical and artistic respects and because of their scenic beauty, and were the ideal setting for an intensive exchange of ideas; the gathering was particularly successful because Hilde Schoefs, a senior researcher at the VCV, attended to absolutely every one of the many practical details that arise at such events. On behalf of all other participants, we wish to convey our deepest gratitude to these two mainstays of the VCV.

We are also indebted to our colleagues Catharina Lis from the Free University of Brussels, Jan Lucassen from the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, Maarten Prak from Utrecht University and Frank Simon from the University of Ghent, who willingly served as commentators. Their valuable and constructive remarks enlightened the debates enormously and revealed new perspectives. Last but not least, we would like to honor S.R. (Larry) Epstein from the London School of Economics and Political Science, who did not only attend the conference in Alden Biesen, but has stimulated the debate on apprenticeship. Unfortunately, this brilliant and amicable colleague died unexpectedly on 3rd February 2007. We dedicate this book to him.

Despite the enthusiasm during and after the colloquium, this book has taken far longer to produce than anticipated. The reason is both simple and complex at the same time: as director of the VCV, Dr Jacobs became so overwhelmed by his new responsibilities that he had to resign as co-editor, and others involved in this exercise suffered extended medical problems or encountered all kinds of unexpected events.

We are very grateful to all the authors, both for their exceptional patience and above all for their willingness – in some cases under difficult circumstances – to submit revised versions of their conference paper. Special thanks are due to Clare Crowston in this respect: she completed her contribution shortly after giving birth to twins. We are pleased to dedicate this volume also to her children Kian, Lili and Reza Banihashem.

