



RIGHT-WING FLANDERS, LEFT-WING WALLONIA ? IS THIS SO ? IF SO, WHY ? AND IS IT A PROBLEM ?

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Foreword

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Since the French Revolution the notions of 'left' and 'right' are part and parcel of political vocabulary. In the French *Assemblée*, the custom grew that advocates of political change and more political equality sat on the left, conservative advocates of a status quo sat on the right, while in the middle were representatives of the people who were looking for a compromise between the two points of view. The notions left – progressive - and right – conservative - gradually spread across the world together with parliamentary regimes. They appealed to the need for capturing political reality in a simple diagram. Since then, many authors have questioned the validity of the notions. One thing is for sure: the notions are indestructible in daily practical politics and in the use of language.

In Belgium the notions have been grafted on the three traditional fault-lines in Belgian politics. Left and right didn't always had the same meaning. Today on the socio-economic fault-line, left stands for more redistribution and solidarity, and right for market thinking and personal responsibility. On the philosophical fault-line, left stands for individual freedom and right for social control. That is not just the case in Belgium. What is specific for Belgium is that the notions left and right have also been embedded in the community fault-lines. Flanders is right, Wallonia left. Is this true? And if so, why is it like that and has it always been like that? That is what this e-book is about.

In his contribution, Henk De Smaele, historian at Antwerp University, demonstrates that as early as the 19th century Flanders voted right and Wallonia left and that it has not much to do with 'objective' socio-economic differences, but rather with a curiously persistent identity construction that is also an explanation for the current success of N-VA.

Jérôme Jamin, political scientist at the Université de Liège, studies the current right-wing political discourse in Flanders and Wallonia. He observes that a 'produceristic' discourse is gaining ground in Flanders, in which Flemings are identified with the hard-working - 'producing' - middle class that is threatened by a parasitic underclass (mostly workers close to the 'Etat PS', unemployed people and migrants) and an equally parasitic upper class (the 'élite' directly linked to the Parti Socialiste). Right-wing Flemish nationalism grafts this discourse onto Walloon compatriots who are described as an unproductive class taking advantage of the Flemish middle class by means of the Belgian state solidarity mechanisms. In Wallonia, a produceristic discourse does not find any firm footing in political and socio-economic reality.

Jaak Billiet, sociologist at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, reports on the findings concerning left and right standpoints in Flanders and Wallonia on the basis of large random samples. The latter were performed by the Institute of Social and Political Research on the occasion of the national elections between 1991 and 2007 and the European Social Survey in 2008. The left-right contrast is far less great than is often presumed in the public discourse. Perceptions of cultural and economic threats differ only very slightly between the two parts of the country, which show a strong resemblance with respect to this item in comparison with other European countries.

Lead Pieces

How ‘real’ is Right-Wing Flanders ?

Henk de Smaele
Universiteit Antwerpen

As the author of a book titled *Rechts Vlaanderen* (de Smaele 2009), I am of course supposed to answer with a straightforward ‘yes’ to one of the central questions of this session: ‘Right-wing Flanders, left-wing Wallonia? Is this so?’ I will indeed argue that right-wing Flanders is a reality, ever since the second half of the nineteenth century. As the reviews of my book have demonstrated, however, it is easy to misunderstand its principal arguments, including my stress on the ‘reality’ of right-wing Flanders. One of the more critical reviews deserves special attention in this context, because it rises some interesting problems that are relevant for the problem we discuss today. Paul Wynants, professor of history at the University of Namur (FUNDP), has examined my study critically in *La Revue Nouvelle* (Wynants 2010). I am quoting here only the first and the last sentences of the essay:

‘Apparemment, certains historiens flamands sont de plus en plus sensibles aux différences qui ont ou auraient existé entre la Flandre et la Wallonie, durant les trente années de gouvernement catholique homogène (1884-1914). En pointant ces différences, ils tentent d’accréditer l’idée d’une Belgique duale, dont la cohésion aurait été affaiblie dès avant la Première Guerre mondiale.’

‘En fin de compte, parce qu’elle est trop systématiquement binaire — Flandre versus Wallonie — et pétrie d’idéologie, une telle appréhension du passé est simpliste et anachronique : elle projette dans le passé une vision du Sud du pays qui ne correspond pas aux réalités de terrain.’

Indeed, the insistence on the electoral and cultural split between the French and Dutch speaking parts of Belgium since the middle of the nineteenth century might be interpreted as underscoring the assertions of Flemish nationalists that there are very few reasons to prolong the life of the divided country. Paul Wynants suggests that a new generation of Flemish historians like myself are involved in a project of rewriting national history and are (consciously or unwittingly) constructing a useable past for a new Flemish autonomous nation. Wynants even charges me with ‘anachronism’, one of the most serious (although common) reproaches a historian can make to a colleague. I am accused of projecting the contemporary and ideologically loaded image of the split nation onto the nineteenth century.

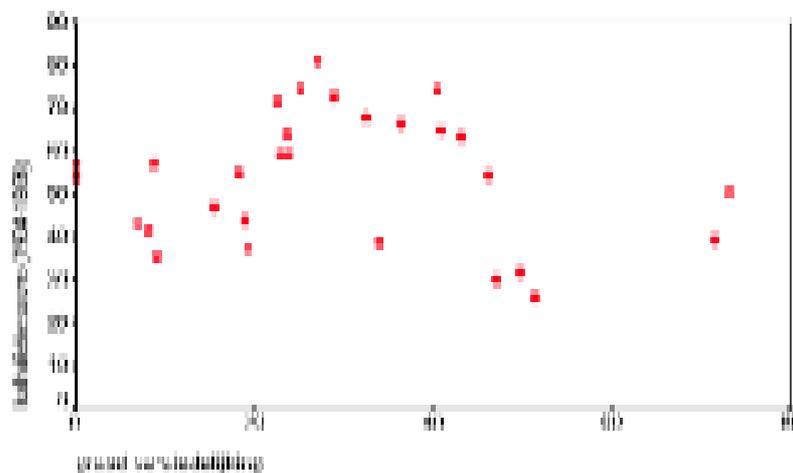
Wynants suggests that, if more Flemish voters opted for the Catholic Party before World War I, this should be explained by an ‘objective’ cause: the lesser degree of industrialisation in Flanders. He therefore argues that Flanders was really different from Wallonia (or that the differences in electoral outcomes should be explained by ‘real’ differences). Flanders voted differently, only to the degree that that Flanders was different from Wallonia (or vice versa). If no regional differences in economic development had characterised Belgium in the nineteenth century, no electoral differences could have come to the fore. For Wynants, voting for a specific party is necessarily linked to the social characteristics of the voter; voters with the same characteristics vote in the same way. What I have tried to demonstrate in my book is that differences in political identities and electoral preferences are

not necessarily grounded in ‘real’ differences. Contrary to Wynants’s accusations, I do pay attention to the heterogeneity of Wallonia and of Flanders. I also show, however, how certain discourses construct differences and unities, differences and unities that are – in Wynants’s sense – not ‘real’. My book therefore, is a plea to take the linguistic, cultural turn in the history of politics (and in political studies more broadly) seriously.

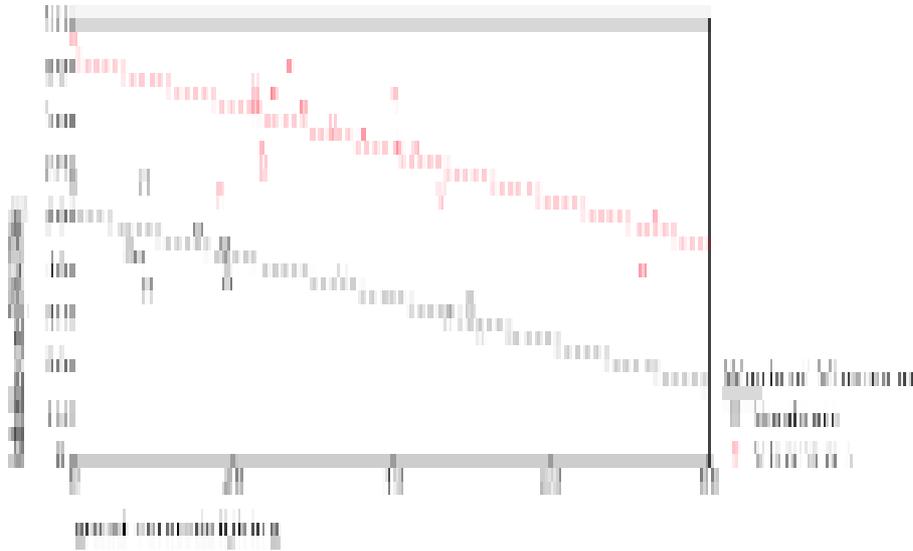
Before I turn to the empirical support for my thesis, let me say something on the more philosophical, ‘ethical’ aspects of the question. Showing how the current electoral pattern has a long history is not contending that Belgium has no future. As a left-wing voter in a right-wing region, I forcefully defend the position that electoral or political homogeneity is not required or desirable in a sound democracy. Both the far right Vlaams Belang and the nationalist N-VA maintain that the gap between the Flemish and the Walloon public opinions are unbridgeable. It is impossible to be at the same time a nationalist and a radical defender of pluralism. Every form of nationalism inevitably contains monist tendencies. I have had the opportunity to explain my anti-monist view on politics in several essays (de Smaele 2002, de Smaele 2006). My book on Rechts Vlaanderen does not, in any way, contribute to a Flemish nationalist logic.

But let me now turn to the empirical base of my thesis, an empirical base that is weak according to Wynants (without, however, discussing the validity of the evidence I offer or adding information that contradicts my findings). Of course, historians working on nineteenth-century elections do not have the research possibilities that political scientists have. Individual polls are not available; only aggregate data can be analysed. This restriction directs researchers into some form of ecological, geographical analysis. In my book, I therefore calculate for every electoral constituency the ‘degree of urbanisation’ (the percentage of the population living in municipalities with at least 10.000 inhabitants) and relate this ‘independent variable’ (on the horizontal X-axis) with the catholic score as the ‘dependent variable’ (on the vertical Y-axis); the dots represent constituencies. As chart 1 shows, no significant relationship can be demonstrated between the two variables (elections of 1904-1906). However, if the difference is made visible between the Flemish and Walloon constituencies (as in chart 2), it becomes instantly clear (confirmed by the linear regression analysis) that there is a significant relationship, but only when considered in the two groups separately. In both groups of electoral districts, the catholic score is negatively related to the degree of urbanization. In a Flemish constituency the catholic score will be on average 30% higher than in a Walloon constituency with the same level of urbanization.

Graph 1: relation between degree of urbanization of the constituency (X) and catholic score (Y)



Graph 2: relation between degree of urbanization of the constituency (X) and catholic score (Y);
division of Flemish (x) and Walloon (o) constituencies

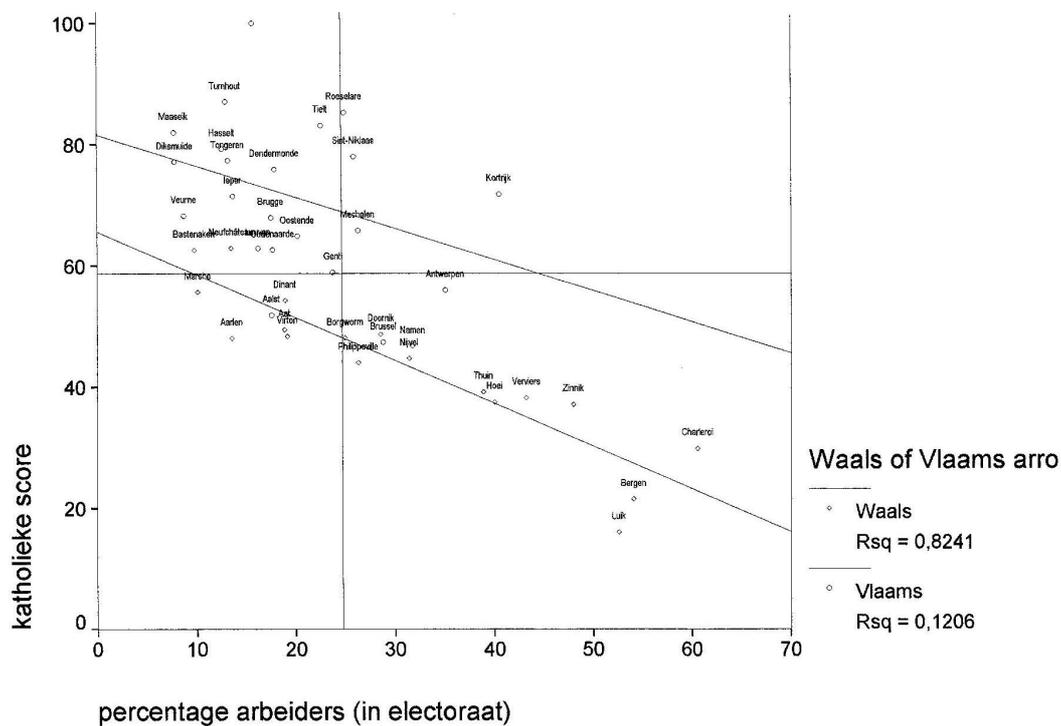


Somehow, these results do not convince Wynants, who deplores that I do not make the same calculations with an independent variable that is more directly related to industrialisation. He states:

'Rétif à l'explication des différences de comportement électoral par des variables socioéconomiques, de Smaele ne soumet pas à vérification l'hypothèse d'un lien direct entre choix politiques et degré d'industrialisation. Ce ne sont pas les sources qui manquent en la matière, ni les indicateurs pertinents : on pense, notamment, à la production énergétique par des machines à vapeur, au nombre d'entreprises de grande taille, à la proportion de travailleurs de l'industrie dans la population active, au pourcentage d'ouvriers dans l'ensemble du corps électoral. De telles données sont évoquées à l'appui d'une analyse des représentations mentales réciproques de la Wallonie et de la Flandre, mais elles sont évacuées lorsqu'il s'agit de scruter les relations entre le comportement électoral et le milieu. Bref, contrairement à ce que de Smaele affirme, on peut douter que les paysages politiques aient été dissemblables, de part et d'autre de la frontière linguistique, essentiellement à cause de différences culturelles et « affectives », et non de différences socioéconomiques : à défaut d'avoir suffisamment pris en compte les réalités économiques et sociales, l'intéressé n'a pas mené à bien pareille démonstration.'

It is true that I have not included any graphs in my book that relate the catholic score to the kind of variables Wynants is asking. I will therefore provide the required chart here (graph 3). It seems obvious that this graph underscores my central thesis: the catholic score is inversely related to the percentage of labourers in the electorate, but the difference between the Flemish and Walloon constituencies is incontestable. A Flemish constituency always has (without exception) a higher catholic score than a Walloon constituency with the same proportion of labourers.

Graph 3: relation between proportion of labourers in the electorate (X) and catholic score (Y)



Confronted with this consistent evidence (that I had not expected), I had to find an explanation for the divergence between the Flemish and Walloon voting patterns. In my book I address two more or less common explanations: the thesis that Flanders was ‘backwards’ and therefore conservative, and the thesis that the Flemish voted in greater numbers for the catholic party because that party was more eager to promote the Flemish interests once in power. I argue that both theses are flawed, and offer a third one instead. Right-wing Flanders came into being once the citizens of Flanders’ provincial towns (like Bruges, Louvain or Ypres) turned away from the liberal party and gave up their urban cultural dreams, and created the myth of rural Flanders instead. Townsmen everywhere in Flanders (one of the more urbanized regions of Europe since the Middle Ages and more urbanized than Wallonia, even on the eve of the First World War) now celebrated the uncultivated peasant as the true Flemish man. It is the time that the Flemish middle class literati studied Dutch to be able to produce Flemish novels on the life of the peasants, and the painters migrated to villages to paint farmers and pastures. Even in Antwerp, Flemish writers and artists lost their interest in the bustling city life and directed their attention to the rural Campine area. Culturally, Flanders consisted only of meadows, picturesque villages, and dead, medieval cities.

I maintain that this shift in Flemish middle class identification and the cultivation of a new discourse on ‘rural Flanders’ is vital in the explanation of the electoral history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Belgium. I believe that it can explain why in socially comparable Flemish and Walloon constituencies, the electoral outcomes could be so different. I admit that my thesis on the ‘cultural ruralisation’ of Flanders cannot be ‘proved’ or ‘falsified’ in any straightforward way, and Paul Wynants certainly has a point when he argues that my analysis of the rise of left-wing Wallonia is based on fewer sources and therefore perhaps less convincing. So far, however, my critics do not seem to be able to offer any convincing counter-evidence.

When I say that ‘right-wing Flanders’ is a reality since the nineteenth century, I am not referring to a real difference (in the classical, mainstream, ‘social’ significance of the word) between Flemish and Walloon voters. What I try to show is that the political orientation of Flanders (observable in all parliamentary elections since the second half of the nineteenth century) cannot be explained by reference to some ‘deeper’, ‘pre-political’ or even ‘ideological’ real cause (in the sense of Wynants). Voting for the right has become one element in the performance of Flemish identity. And a remarkably stable element as well. Although the economic balance has shifted dramatically since the nineteenth century, and notwithstanding the shift in the significance of the term ‘right-wing’ itself, the Flemish voters still opt in great majorities for right-wing parties. Most interestingly, voting for right-wing parties in Flanders still has the same tinge to it of ‘anti-establishment protest’ it had in the nineteenth century, when the middle classes in the provincial towns chose to vote for the party that was depicted by the progressive circles of the cities as ‘backward’, ‘reactionary’, ‘obscurantist’. Again, today, in the discourse of Bart De Wever, Dedecker and the likes, voting for the right is represented as a rebellion against the all powerful old school ‘Left Wing church’ that supposedly governs Belgium. In their discourse, voting for a right wing party is being recalcitrant, a ‘brave’ form of resistance against the overwhelming forces of ‘progress’ and ‘change’ (and e.g. the ‘spirit of the sixties’). Although Flanders has become a rich, post-industrial region, the nationalist right-wing parties still cultivate the image of an oppressed Flanders, a Flanders that is belittled and ridiculed, the victim of condescension and arrogance. Going to the ballot box and voting for a right-wing party is still a ritual of expressing Flemish pride in its ‘backwardness’, in its stubborn resistance against the Spirit of Change, supposedly incarnated in the cosmopolitan, French-speaking elites in Brussels. They feel like *kluuwaerds*, facing the King of France on the battlefield of Groeninghe.

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Flanders and Wallonia, Right versus Left: is this Real ?

Jaak Billiet
K.U.Leuven

I was asked to reflect on the questions ‘*is Flanders right and Wallonia left?*’ in the light of the finding of survey research on public opinions, attitudes and values in the past decennia. It is common in Belgian public opinion to state that Flanders is (Centrum) right and Wallonia (Centrum) left when one refers to the political landscapes of this two regions.¹ The strength of the political parties on the left-right dimension is indeed very different in these regions. What do we however mean by right and left? Several dimensions are distinguished in the literature on ideological conservatism (Middendorp, 1978): political, cultural, and economical. I will deal with two of these, economical and cultural. *Conservatism* is commonly associated with *right*, and *progressiveness* with *left*. I do not use these ‘coloured’ words since these express to much an appreciation and are part of debates between social groups in society. Take for example the (extreme) protection of actual welfare state achievements at cost of care for future generations. Is this progressive, or rather an expression of conservatism.

I will made some preliminary remarks before starting. Most of my work is on the methodology of the measurement of trends and changes in public opinion by means of large population datasets. This work was mainly comparative during last decennia. I am however very critical towards published statistics on public opinion issues. I do not consider figures about response distributions of specific opinion questions as ‘hard facts’ or ‘truths’ but rather as signs that need interpretation in the context of knowledge about society, insight in the way the results are produced, and measured. Statistical figures cannot be interpreted without knowledge of methodological rules about measurement, sampling, and non-response (that what is not observed). A basic rule in the interpretation of responses to questions is ‘*do not trust single questions*’ but rely on latent variables that are tested in the context of measurement models for multiple indicators.

What do we mean by ‘*public opinion*’? There are several public opinions that are related. There is the PO of the media which is made by journalists, commentators... These interpret what the public opinion is from their interest, values, and ideology. There is also the PO of the opinion leaders. The discourse of politicians about their interpretation of PO as it appears in voting behaviour and voting intentions is also biased by their interests, norm and values. Finally, we have ‘public opinion’ as it is measured in opinion polls or in social research (which is absolutely not same). This is PO as aggregation of individual opinions. Needless to say that there are here too many sources of bias. One should take this into account at occasion of the interpretation of this PO. In sum, there is not one

¹ The situation in Brussels is not so clear. Brussels is not only a region but also a large urban agglomeration which made it on itself different from Flanders and Wallonia, and not so easy to compare with these. I will therefore focus on Flanders and Wallonia, as was asked, and do not consider the region Brussels. An additional reason is that the samples for Brussels are mostly too small for obtaining reliable conclusions. Brussels is included where figures for Belgium as a whole are shown

public opinion but a variety of related public opinions. I will now further focus on the third conception of PO as measured in opinion research.

1. Dimensions of left and right in the ESS and ISPO surveys

I will not start with a theoretical discussion about the dimensions and sub-dimensions of the left-right orientation or ideology but simply present the data that I have and will use to find an answer to questions about the position of the Flemish and Walloons. The sources that I will use are several waves of the Belgian post election surveys of the *Institute of Social and Political Research* (ISPO/PIOP) between 1991 and 2007² at occasion of each general elections and data the fourth round of the *European Social Survey* held in 2008.

The sample sizes of the electoral surveys vary between minimum 1750 and maximum 4511 interviewed voters. These are two-step samples selected randomly from the National Register. The data was collected by ISPO (K.U. Leuven) and PIOP (UCL). These datasets contain aspects of political right (ethnocentrism, authoritarianism), or related concepts (national consciousness). There are also some items that measure economic conservatism.

The realised country samples of ESS round 4 are all between 1549 and 2751 in the twelve European random samples I will use in order to place Belgium (and Flanders and Wallonia) in a perspective. Round 4 of ESS contains a large module on the role of the state concerning social equality, and the consequences of social benefits provided by the state (Van Oorschot, 2010). It is easy to identify here left and right attitudes towards welfare state provisions.

I start with the social-economic left-right dimension in next section. Then an aspect of political right is discussed, ethnocentrism, or more specific 'ethnic threat' which contains several stereotypical expressions about immigrants. The evolution of this attitude towards immigrants is studied in Flanders and Wallonia over time (1991-2007). Finally in the final section, the relation between ethnic threat, Islamophobia, and (sub)national identity is analysed in the region samples. Focus is on this relation since a remarkable and stable difference in relation is found since 1995. The election survey of 2007 is used here.

2. Left and right attitudes towards welfare state

The following five aspect of welfare state provisions or social benefits are measured in ESS round 4:

(1) An attitude towards the RESPONSIBILITY OF THE GOVERNMENT concerning social benefits. This attitude was measured by a set of six questions (10-point scales). A reliable latent variable GOVERN_RESP was measured with these six indicators.

People have different views on what the responsibilities of governments⁴⁵ should or should not be. For each of the tasks I read out please tell me on a score of 0-10 how much responsibility you think governments should have. 0 means it should not be governments' responsibility at all and 10 means it should be entirely governments' responsibility'
- '...ensure a job for everyone who wants one?'

² The data of the 2010 Elections are on the issues of interest for this study are not yet analyzed.

- ‘...ensure adequate health care for the sick?’
- ‘...ensure a reasonable standard of living⁴ for the old?’
- ‘...ensure a reasonable standard of living for the unemployed?’
- ‘...ensure sufficient child care services for working parents?’
- ‘...provide paid leave from work for people who temporarily have to care for sick family members?’

A composite score on this variable in the range 0 to 10 is computed for respondents. In this measurement, 0 indicates a marked right wing attitude (no government responsibility for social benefits) and 10 expresses a marked left attitudes. Moderate respondents are in the middle of the scale. The direction of the scores is given by the way the statements are worded. In this case they are all expressing in favour of state responsibilities for social benefits, and this is normally considered a left wing stance.

The other dimensions are each measured with a 5-point response scale ranging from completely disagree (1) to completely disagree agree (5). As one can see, in two of the item sets are worded in the direction of a left viewpoint (with exception of one item in the income equality set, and two sets express ideological right wing ideas.

(2) INCOME EQUALITY (INC_EQUAL):

- *The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels (+)*
 - *Large differences in people’s incomes are acceptable to properly reward differences to obey authority (-)**
 - *For a society to be fair, differences in people’s standard of living should be small (+)*
- * This item is reversed in composite scale.

The composite score of this variable also ranges from 0 (right: not in favour of equality policy) to 10 (left: marked attitude in favour of equality policy).

(3) SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF WS SOCIAL BENEFITS (SOC_CONS):

- *Social benefits prevent widespread poverty*
- *Social benefits lead to more equal society*
- *Social benefits make it easier for people to combine work and family*

The composite score of this variable also ranges from 0 (right: not in favour of equality policy) to 10 (left: marked attitude in favour of equality policy).

(4) MORAL CONSEQUENCES OF SOCIAL BENEFITS (MORAL_CO):

- *Social benefits and services make people lazy*
- *Social benefits and services make people less willing to care for one another*
- *Social benefits and services make people less willing to look after themselves and their family*

The composite score of this variable also ranges from 0 to 10 but for this variable a higher score indicates a more right since it endorses the idea (or conclusion) that there are negative moral consequences related to social benefits.

(5) ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF SOCIAL BENEFITS (ECO_CONS):

- Social benefits place too great a strain on the economy
- Social benefits cost business too much in taxes and charges

The composite score of this variable also ranges from 0 to 10 and a higher score indicates a more right stance since it endorses the idea that negative effects of social benefits for economy.

Mean differences between Flemish and Walloon voters

The differences in mean scores between Flemish and Walloon respondents are shown in Table 1. The meaning of a mean score in a sample is a summary of a distribution and can mean several things depending on the dispersion around the scores around the mean. We present for that reason also the standard deviation that expresses how weak or strong the scores vary around the mean score.

Table 1. Mean composite scores and standard deviations of five aspects of the social-economic left-right dimension the Flemish and Walloon samples of ESS round 4 (mean scores on 10-point scales).

Aspect		Flanders		Wallonia		prob
		Mean score	SD	Mean score	SD	
10 = left	Government responsibility SB*	7.201	1.149	7.103	1.260	ns
	Income equality	5.632	1.860	6.014	1.910	< .0001
	Social consequences of SB	6.680	1.414	6.615	1.654	ns
10 = right	Moral consequences SB	4.931	2.005	5.628	2.136	< .0001
	Economic consequences SB	5.956	1.977	5.782	2.243	ns
Sample sizes (N)		565		1034		

(SB: social benefits)

In order to compensate for the summary information in the means, percentages of the significant differences are also given in the comments to the means that are significantly different between Flemish and Walloons. Three of the scales are not significant (*ns*). This means that one can not exclude the hypotheses that the two samples do not differ from each other. We focus on the two significant differences, income equality and moral consequences.

The two significant differences in mean score are in the scales in which higher scores indicate are in variables that are measured by indicators worded in a different direction, income equality and moral (negative) consequences. A t-test shows that the Walloon score on *social equality* is significantly different from the mean score in Flanders ($t = -3.90$; $p < 0.0001$). Wallonia is indeed, as one could expect, somewhat more left than Flanders on the income equality dimension. About 76% of the Walloons agree that the government should reduce differences in income levels; this is ten percent point lower in Flanders (66%). More Walloons (28%) than Flemish (21%) do not accept that large differences are acceptable to reward talents and efforts. The opinions concerning small differences in standard of living are not so marked.

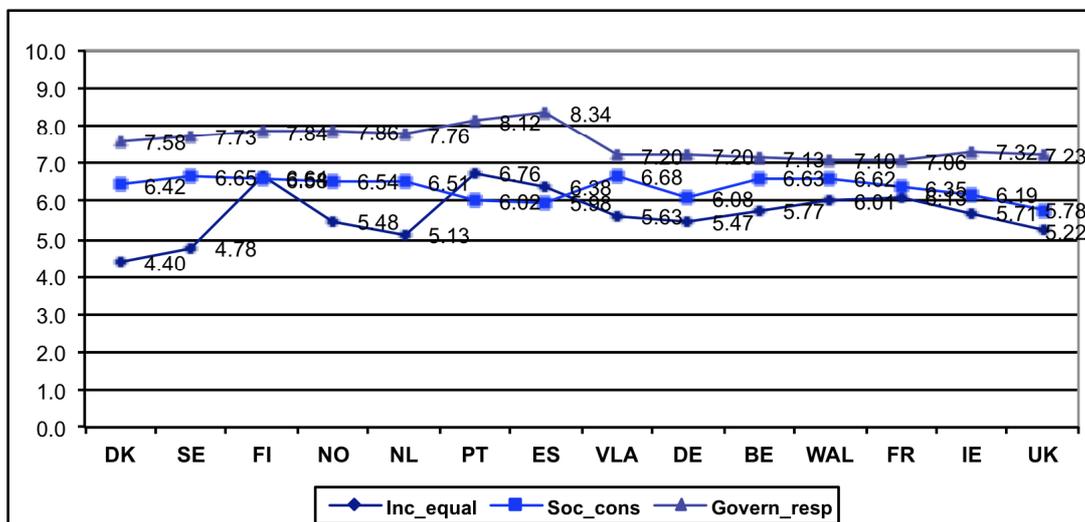
The second significant difference is in the mean score of the *moral consequences* of social benefits. The Walloons endorse significantly more the idea that social benefits (SB) make people lazy, and less willing to care for each other ($t = -6.32$; $p < .0001$). It is possible that this reflects more a perception of

others than an attitude. More citizens in the environment take profit from welfare benefits than in Flanders because of higher unemployment and age of population. Much more Walloons (48%) than Flemish (38%) agree with this statement. The largest difference has been found in the statement that social benefits and services make people less willing to look after themselves and their family. This is endorsed by the majority of the Walloon respondents (53%) and only by 31% of the Flemish..

Attitudes towards social benefits and income equality in some European context

Let us now consider the attitudes toward government responsibility concerning social benefits, some consequences of social benefits, and income equality in the contexts of European countries. Two different figures are shown depending on the direction of the scale. High scores indicate a left attitude in the first figure.

Figure 1. Mean composite scores on income equality, social consequences of social benefits, and responsibility of the government for social benefits (ESS round 4).



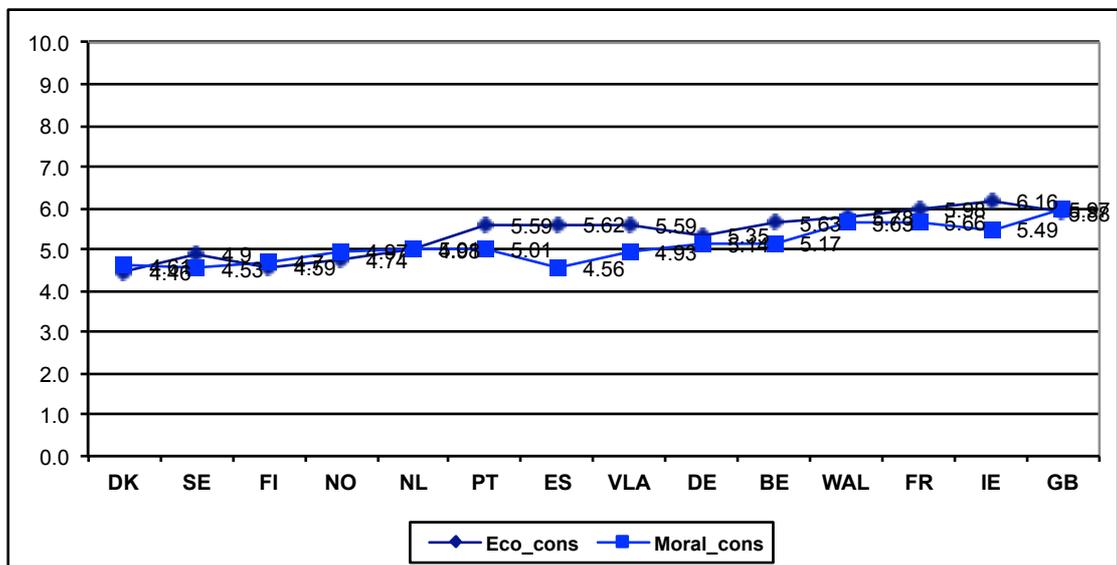
The North European countries score in general higher (more left) on government responsibility and positive social consequences of social benefits. Spain and Portugal show however the highest scores on government responsibility. The idea that social care and social benefits are a responsibility of the government is strongest in these two countries.

Is it surprising the North European countries, except Finland, score lower on the aspect of income equality. Is it because the respondents from these countries have the impression that the social equality is sufficiently realised in their country? Both Flanders and Wallonia score rather low on government responsibility, but have nearly the highest scores on the acceptance of the positive social consequences of social benefits.

Figure 2 shows the two aspects that are scaled in different direction and where high scores indicates ideological right position and low scores a right position. This figure shows clearly that the citizens in the Northern countries are in the average more left than right. The scores on negative economic consequences are in the Nordic countries significantly lower than in all other countries. They do not

so strongly admit that social benefits have negative consequences for the economy neither that there are negative moral consequences and that people become lazy and loss their solidarity. These democracies are more able to avoid the negative consequences of their social policy than the other Western countries. Countries as France, the United Kingdom, and to a lesser extent Ireland belong to the opposite side. Worse economic and moral consequences are in average more observed. Flanders and Wallonia have a more moderate position, but the different between these two regions are not significant. The scores for the two aspects deviate from each other in Flanders, but this is even stronger the case in Spain that is left side like the Nordic concerning the moral aspect but more right concerning the economic consequences.

Figure 2. Mean scores on consequences for economy and moral consequences of social benefits (ESS round 4)



Attitude towards equality and the role of unions in ISPO/PIOP

We will now consider a small set of questions of the Belgian post election survey before concluding this section on economic and social left and right. ISPO 1999 contains a set of questions measuring the attitude towards trade unions, and income reduction with, as far as one can compare, rather stable results over time. The mean composite scores on a 10-point scale are 6.39 in Flanders and 2.60 in Wallonia. This difference is significant ($p < .001$) and was confirmed by the later findings of ESS round 4 about income differences. The Walloons do stronger support income equality policy and the role of the trade unions as we could expect.

Left and right in the economic dimension

One may conclude that the attitudes in Flanders and Wallonia are all by all not so different on the left-right dimension as one should believe when the strength of the political parties is considered. The differences in political power (measured votes obtained by political parties) is much marked than the differences in opinions about social equality, social benefits provided by the state, and welfare state responsibilities. It seems in other words that all, left and right, recognised the achievements of the

welfare state system. In that sense are the items used in ESS and also in ISPO rather moderate. Let us now move to the second aspect of the left-right ideology: ethnocentrism.

3. The evolution of ethnic threat in Flanders and Wallonia

Ethnocentrism, or the attitude towards ethnic minorities (in this case ‘immigrants’) is a dimension of political right. Is there a difference between the Flemish and Walloons, and do we observe a change over time? In order to answer this question, we can rely on the large random samples of the *Belgian Post Election Surveys* between 1991 and 2007. The questionnaires contained in each election survey a set of minimum 9 questions on the perception (or feelings) of economic and cultural threat by immigrants.

Equivalent measurement of ethnic threat

It is important that the meaning of the latent variable ‘ethnic threat’ has not changed over time and that we can rely on a equivalent measured concept between Flemish and Walloons, and over time. Four observed identical indicators in each of the surveys. This is a reduced measurement of full item set, but we have observed that this small set of four items correlates strongly with the full scales in the two regions. The four strictly comparable items are the following:

‘In general, immigrants cannot be trusted’.

‘Immigrants take advantage of our social security system’.

‘Immigrants are a threat to our culture and customs’.

‘The presence of different cultures enriches our society’.

The response scales vary from disagree (1) to completely agree (5) (last item is reversed in the analysis).

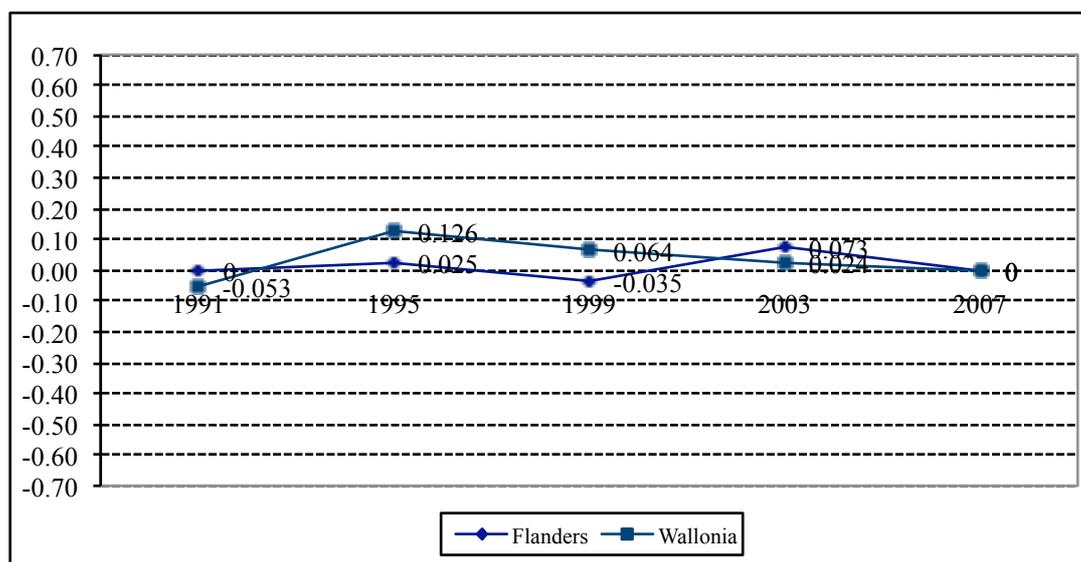
The measurement models for the two regions and five elections, controlled for changes in age and education composition of the samples over time, are tested using *Multi Group Structural Equation Modelling* for ordinal scaled variables (Jöreskog, 1990). Special attention is paid to measurement validity and to equivalent measurement (Cheung & Rensvold, 1999). A complete invariant model was not rejected. This means that one can conclude that the four indicator measure an equivalent latent variable which has the same meaning between regions and over time. It is thus possible to compare the means between the 10 samples (two region samples times five elections).

Findings

The scores on the latent variables are expressed as deviations from a reference sample, this is a score of zero for the Flemish sample in 1991. Higher scores are higher than zero, and lower scores are lower than zero (negative values). In order to have an idea what this means for the composite score of ‘ethnic threat’ on a ten-point scale (10 = maximum score on feeling threatened by immigrants) immigrants, we give the scores on a 10-point scale for 1999: mean value in Flanders is 5.22, and in Wallonia 5.48. The Walloons score in average significantly lower ($p < 0.01$) on ethnic threat than the Flemish in 1991 and 2003, but they scored significantly higher in 1995 and 1999 ($p < 0.001$). There was no difference between in mean score between Flemish and Walloons in 2007. The negative attitude in the Flemish population decreased in the nineties until the 9/11 attack. It starts then to increase and was highest in 2005, but has again decreased afterwards. Notice that we have only observations for years of general elections and no information in between. After an increase in 1995 a permanent trend

down is observed. The mean scores of Flemish and Walloons are equal in 2007. We do not see the very likely effect of 9/11 in Wallonia.

Figure 3. Means of latent variable ethnic threat in Flanders and Wallonia over time (ISPO/PIOP)



The differences in mean (latent) scores in the measured attitude towards immigrants are all by all not so large as ‘public opinion’ in the media sometimes suggests. This is what we found in previous research since 1991 (Billiet, 2006; Billiet et al., 2006). Perceptions of cultural threat seemed somewhat more market in Flanders, but perception of economic threat is somewhat higher in Wallonia. This is not strange given the differences in economic situation. Let us take an example of ISPO 2007:

‘Immigrants take advantage of our social security system’ (2007)

Flemish sample = 52% agree and Walloon sample = 58% agree

‘Immigrants are a threat to our culture and customs’ (2007)

Flemish sample = 42% agree, Walloon sample = 38% agree

The idea in public opinion that the Flemish endorse more negative attitudes towards immigrant or that they are more racist than the Walloons is in other words a strong simplification the real attitudes in these populations.

4. Ethnic threat and (sub)national identity among Flemish and Walloons

Let us now consider the relation between xenophobia and (sub)national identity. The later is a proxy measure for national consciousness which is an aspect of nationalism. Some stress the necessity for an open form of identity that embraces newcomers as long as they participate in society by respecting the law. This refers to a civic concept of the nation (Billiet et al., 2003). Others seem to have a different notion of what it means to adhere to the (sub)national rules of the game. Sharing a (sub)national identity assumes sharing a common history, language and even common descent. These are the elements of the so-called ‘primordial autochthony’ (Roosens, 1998; Jaspert, 2009), and refer to an ethnic concept of national identity.

(Sub)national identities in Belgium

Belgium is a telling example of a state whose citizens are faced with two competing projects of nation-building. The most obvious national identity remains the official Belgian one, but the main sub-national entities, Flanders and Wallonia, have acquired a substantial degree of autonomy during the last decades two and both (in particular Flanders) promote a specific 'national' identity. The Flemish identity appears to be associated with the protection of Flemish cultural heritage. Conversely, the Walloon identity is primarily associated with the social-economic emancipation of the Walloon region, and also with anti-racism and openness towards other cultures (Van Dam, 1996). Historically, Flemish nationalism was rooted in the political 'right'. Between the early 1990s and 2007, election after election an extreme right-wing, xenophobic Flemish national party (*Vlaams Blok/Belang*) increased its share of votes in the Flemish part of the country. In the context of early industrialisation which was accompanied by large immigration streams from Southern Europe (and even Flanders), regionalism in Wallonia was politically 'left'. The political extreme right in Wallonia adheres to Belgian nationalism.

Given these differences in political and historical context, one might expect that the collective representations of 'what a nation is' to differ according to its referent; Belgium, Wallonia or Flanders. Consequently, one might expect that in Flanders, citizens who intensely identify with Flanders will tend to have a negative attitude towards foreigners, while those who intensely identify with Belgium will tend to be more positive towards newcomers. The relationship between the attitude towards foreigners and the (bipolar) national identity variable is expected to be more diffuse in Wallonia, because the representations of the Belgian and Walloon identities are less distinct. However, assuming that the civic representation of Belgium is somewhat tainted by the ethnic-cultural views of the extreme right, it can be expected that a negative attitude towards foreigners will tend to coincide with an intense Belgian, rather than Walloon, identification (Billiet et al., 2003: 243-244). We will now test the hypothesis with the data from the 2007 post-election survey and find out how stable the previous findings are.

Data and Methods

The sample from the 2007 *Belgian General (post) Election Survey* is a regionally stratified; two-step, random sample of the 18-85 year old population of Belgian citizens (from the National Register), with equal selection probabilities of the secondary sampling units. Samples from the Flemish (N = 1,084) and Walloon regions (N = 717) are used in this study. The response rates were 61% and 65% respectively (Billiet & Swyngedouw, 2009; Baudewyns et al., 2010). Data collection was organised by means of *Computer Assisted Personnel Interviews* (CAPI).

This study focuses on three multiple indicator latent variables: perceived ethnic threat (THREAT), (sub)national identity (NAT_ID) and Islamophobia (ISLAMPH). The first is based on a quasi-balanced set of eight items. Islamophobia is measured by seven items, of which five are negatively worded towards Islam (see Appendix). It was possible to specify a response style factor, a tendency to agree with items (Billiet & McClendon, 2000). Respondents with higher scores on the latent variables feel more threatened by immigrants for cultural and economic reasons (welfare, social security, employment) and feel more negative towards Muslims in Europe.

The measurement of (sub)national identity deserves somewhat more attention. The first identity indicator is a four-point scale measure, based on two-choice questions about the first and second geopolitical (subjective) identity: Flemish/Walloon (score 4), Belgium (score 1) and intermediate positions. The second indicator is the so-called ‘*Moreno question*’ about exclusive or dual identity, where low values express exclusive identification with Belgium and high values exclusive identification with Flanders/Wallonia. The next variable (*Decide*) is an eleven-point scale with scores depending on the degree to which the respondent endorses that the federal level (Belgian state) should decide everything (lower scores), or the degree to which the respondent endorses the opposite view; that Flanders/Wallonia should decide (higher scores). The last item (*Split_B*) is a multiple choice question with ordered categories ranging from the statement that the Unitarian Belgian state must be restored (score 1), to splitting up Belgium into two separate states (score 5). The response scales are shown in the appendix.

Findings

The measurement models for the two regions are tested using *Multi Group Structural Equation Modelling* for ordinal scaled variables (Jöreskog, 1990). Special attention is paid to measurement validity and to equivalent measurement (Cheung & Rensvold, 1999). Top-down modelling has been used, starting from a full invariant measurement model over the two groups: invariant slopes (metric equivalence), invariant intercepts (scalar equivalence) in the measurement part, and in the structural part, equality of the variances and co-variances of the latent variables between the two samples.³ This model is rejected.⁴ We then move step by step towards a model that fits well with the data by specifying restrictions. The means and the correlations between the latent variables have the following characteristics in the final model (see the last part of Table 4)⁵:

- the latent mean of NAT_ID is different in the two samples, it is *significantly lower* in Wallonia;
 - the latent mean of THREAT is estimated but *not significantly different* in the two samples;
 - the latent mean of ISLAMPH is significantly different in the two samples and *slightly higher* in Wallonia;
 - the variance of NAT_ID is different between the regions;
 - the correlation (or co-variance) between ISLAMPH and NAT_ID is *significantly different* in the two regions;
 - the correlation between THREAT and NAT_ID is also significantly different in the two regions;
- (7) finally.

As in previous research, in all models, the response style (acquiescence) is significant and not different in the two samples.

The estimated parameters of the final are in Table 2. It is clear that the measurement quality of the measured concepts is very good. There are no cross-loadings, the relationships between the latent variables and appropriate indicators are in general strong, a response style factor is controlled for among all agree-disagree items and the parameters are all invariant, except one.

³ The complete test information for all models can be obtained from the authors.

⁴ $\chi^2 = 1,663.20$; $df = 338$; $RMSEA = 0.075$; $p[\text{close fit}] = 0.00$; $CFI = 0.859$.

⁵ The indicator *decide* is more weaker related to NAT_ID in Flanders than in Wallonia and most important. Test of the final model: $\chi^2 = 772.33$; $df = 331$; $RMSEA = 0.044$; $p[\text{close fit}] = 0.995$; $CFI = 0.954$.

The level of threat does not differ between Flanders and Wallonia, but the correlations between THREAT and NAT_ID are reversed (see bottom part of the table) The correlation is positive (+0.26; $t = 7.461$) in Flanders and negative (-0.24; $t = -6.372$) in Wallonia, which means that a higher score for ethnic threat is somewhat more likely to correspond to a higher score for Flemish sub-national identity. The opposite is true in the Walloon sample. Walloons are more likely to have lower scores for Walloon identity when they score higher for threat. The relationship is identical in Wallonia for ISLAMPH and NAT_ID (-0.24; $t = -6.350$). The relationship between ISLAMPH and NAT_ID in Flanders is in the opposite direction, and stronger (+0.32; $t = 8.920$), than was the case with THREAT. This means that Flemish respondents who score higher for (sub)national identity are more likely to feel threatened by the presence of Muslims.

Table 2: Full equivalent measurement model (scalar and metric invariance) in the Flemish and Walloon samples (Within group completely standardised factor loadings and correlations between latent variables)

Items	<i>Ethnic threat</i>	<i>Islamophobia</i>	<i>(Sub)national identity</i>		<i>Response style</i>
	<i>(in both samples)</i>	<i>(in both samples)</i>	<i>Flemish</i>	<i>Walloon</i>	<i>(in both samples)</i>
Q114_1	0.797				0.112
Q114_2	-0.751				0.112
Q114_3	0.817				0.112
Q114_4	0.873				0.112
Q114_5	-0.781				0.112
Q114_6	0.791				0.112
Q114_7	0.746				0.112
Q114_8	0.829				0.112
D32_1		-0.773			0.112
D32_2		0.627			0.112
D32_3		0.608			0.112
D32_4		0.836			0.112
D32_5		0.813			0.112
D32_6		0.902			0.112
D32_7		-0.705			0.112
First_id			0.793		
Exclus_VW			0.789		
Decide			0.632	0.749	
Split_B			0.750		
Stand. cov.	<i>Ethnic threat</i>	<i>Islamophobia</i>	<i>(Sub)national identity</i>		<i>Response style</i>
Flanders					
<i>Threat</i>	1.000				
<i>Islamophobia</i>	0.790	1.000			
<i>(Sub)national</i>	0.259	0.319	1.000		
<i>Resp. style</i>	-	--			1.000
Stand. cov	<i>Ethnic threat</i>	<i>Islamophobia</i>	<i>(Sub)national identity</i>		<i>Response style</i>
Wallonia					
<i>Threat</i>	1.000				
<i>Islamophobia</i>	0.790	1.000			
<i>(Sub)national</i>	-0.243	-0.240	1.000		
<i>Resp. style</i>	--	--			1.000

We may conclude that our hypotheses are not rejected. Does this mean that the mediating effect of *civic representation* on the relationship between (sub)national identity and ethnic threat or Islamophobia is confirmed? No, one can only conclude that this relationship is plausible and not rejected so far. There is no direct measurement of civic representation at individual level in the general election surveys, and thus no test for it. A test by survey research or a more qualitative approach is for future research.

To conclude

I have discussed two dimensions of the left-right ideology in Flanders and Wallonia and observed the relations of one of these dimensions with (sub)national consciousness. The relation found in the general election survey of ISPO in 2007 reproduces the relation already observed in previous surveys since 1995. The relation is reversed in the two regions, and it is possible to interpret this when one takes historical factors into account. Subnationalism in Flanders is predominantly right wing which is not the case in Wallonia. One should also consider the somewhat different meaning of national identity in Flanders and regionalism in Wallonia, both aspects measured by an equivalent set of items. One element of the explanation, differences in the conception of citizenship (instrumental versus ethnic) is plausible but it needs further research.

The differences in mean (latent) scores in the measured attitude towards immigrants are all by all not so large as 'public opinion' in the media sometimes suggests. This is what we found in previous research since 1991 (Billiet, 2006; Billiet et al., 2006). Perceptions of cultural threat seemed somewhat more marked in Flanders, but perception of economic threat is somewhat higher in Wallonia.

Concerning the social and economic left-right attitudes, one may conclude that these attitudes in Flanders and Wallonia are all by all not so different on the left-right dimension as one should believe when the strength of the political parties is considered. In the context of the surrounding European context the two Belgian regions are relatively close to each other. Only Germany is in between. The differences in political power (measured votes obtained by political parties) is much marked than the differences in opinions about social equality, social benefits provided by the state, and welfare state responsibilities. It seems in other words that all, left and right, recognised the achievements of the welfare state system. In that sense are the items used in ESS and also in ISPO rather moderate measures of the left-right dimension.

Appendix

Observed indicators for perceived ethnic threat, Islamphobia, and (sub)national identity.

Item	Ethnic threat
Q114_1	In general, immigrants are not to be trusted (-)
Q114_2	Immigrants contribute to the country's welfare (+)
Q114_3	Guest workers come here to take advantage of our social security system (-)
Q114_4	Immigrants are a threat to our culture and customs (-)
Q114_5	The presence of different cultures enriches our society (+)
Q114_6	Most immigrants are lazy, who try to avoid hard work (-)
Q114_7	Guest workers are a threat to the employment of Belgians (-)
Q114_8	Immigrants' way of life is irreconcilable with Western Europeans' way of life (-)
Item	Islamfobia
D32_1	The Islam can contribute to the European culture (+)
D32_2	Muslim men dominate their wives (-)
D32_3	Muslims do attach great importance to their children's education (-)
D32_4	If it really matters Muslims turn against Europe (-)
D32_5	The Islamic culture and history are more violent than others (-)
D32_6	Islamic values are a threat to the European culture (-)
D32_7	Most Muslims have respect for our culture and our way of living (+)
Item	(Sub)national identity
First_id	4-point scale (0 = first identification with Belgium --- 3 = first identification with Flanders/Wallonie)
Exclus_VW	5-point scale (1 = exclusive Belgium --- 5 = exclusive Flemish/Walloon)
Decide	11-point scale (0 = Belgium must decide --- 10 = Flanders must decide)
Split_B	5-point scale (1 = Unitarian Belgium state --- 5 = split the state)

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The Producerist Narrative in Right-Wing Flanders

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The balance of power between political parties differs and has evolved differently in the North and in the South of Belgium, nevertheless, this will not let us saying that ‘the North has turned toward the Right and the South has turned toward the Left’, mainly because of the many complexities and the multiplicity of potentially essential factors that need to be gathered to go in this way.

However, if we were to focus exclusively on discourse, which is what we are going to do, we would believe quite convincingly that much of the political discourse in Flanders leans more to the Right than the political discourses found in either Wallonia or Brussels. And when asked, ‘Why is it this way?’ we would likely explain it by identifying certain notions of responsibility and of merit in political discourse, and their particular and effective use found in Flanders.

Finally, when asked to provide an answer to the question: ‘whether the aforementioned is a problem,’ our response would be ‘No’ within the context of a region looking for competition with other regions inside the European Union, but deeply ‘Yes’ if we stay inside the federal context of Belgium. In this paper we will argue that the Right in Flanders is promoting a curious partnership between *settling* (inburgering in Dutch) and *merit* in order to maintain the standard of the neoliberal credo in an inequitable Europe in crisis¹.

1. The Left/Right Divide

The Left / Right split yields only a simplified analysis of political phenomena. If one believes Rémond (2002), the question of criteria ‘which separates infallibly the Right from the Left is the very type of question that does not and may not contain an adequate response for the mind.’ In the absence of a unanimously agreed upon term and definition, explains the historian, ‘there is no other way than to search the past for signs from which to build a concept of Right and Left.’ And if you follow this path, he adds, it does not take long ‘to discover that every, or almost every, major theme has been a subject of ideological controversy and was, in turn, the prerogative of the Right then the Left, and visa versa, and then back again.’ (Author’s translation of Rémond, 2002: 30 and 31).

If Rémond has France in mind when he is writing his article, we believe this fact fits also with the Belgian situation, all the more if we take into account the coalition systems in Belgium, France and several Western countries. In fact, people from differing political points of view have had to work

¹ I would like to thank my colleague at CEDEM Joe Costanzo, from University of Maryland, for its support in the writing of this paper in English.

closely and collaboratively in the establishment of centrist policies, sometimes leaning slightly toward the Left, sometimes slightly toward the Right, according to the agreed-upon terms of those in government. In explaining the French-speaking Belgian Socialist Party (*le Parti socialiste, PS*), Olivier Bailly (2010) suggests that even ‘while in power, the [Socialist] party manages to embody the contestation and resistance to neoliberalism represented by the Belgian federal state.’ This discourse, he adds, is ‘facilitated by an electoral system where the necessary alliances let the parties avoiding responsibilities for the policies put in place.’ Ultimately, the ‘PS accomplishes its *tour de force* by being both seasoned and youthful, rebellious and in power, Leftist in its discourse all the while implementing Right-leaning decisions in practice. The PS engages in the liberalisation of public services, in drastically controlling the unemployed and in lengthening the duration of careers.’ (Author’s translation of Bailly, 2010, 3).

If we focus exclusively on the analysis of discourse and not on actions to address a Right-leaning Flanders or a Left-leaning Wallonia, the challenge would be different and in many ways it would be more plausible to identify clear differences between the rhetorical style of the Left and the Right. That said, from the outset, we think, and here we attempt to demonstrate, that it is worth emphasizing the discursive movement to the Right in the political rhetoric in Flanders as opposed to some hypothetical political discursive movement to the Left in the southern part of the country.

Let us examine the work of Bobbio who attempted to differentiate a Right from a Left discourse as it related to Equality (Bobbio, 1996). We pursue this line of inquiry because the rhetoric that we will analyze in the next section is based in part on the perception that people can have of their peers — in terms of equality between individuals (“Are we equal?”) — and, in part on the distribution and the criteria for the distribution of resources between individuals deemed equal, and between them and others deemed to be unequal, especially in terms of responsibility and merit.

For the man on the Left and the man on the Right, the fact that men are equal or not equal, Bobbio says, depends solely on the fact that ‘in the observing, judging and drawing of conclusions, we place more emphasis on what they have in common or on what distinguishes them.’ The difference between Left and Right rests on the fact that there are those who think that men are ‘more equal than unequal,’ and then there are those who believe that men are ‘more unequal than equal.’ Thus, the ‘egalitarian’ discourse on the Left stipulates that ‘most of the inequalities that provoke its indignation — and those that the Left would like to see disappear — are of social origin, and as such, are able to be overcome, regardless of an individual’s inherent qualities (intelligence, merit, responsibility, physical strength, etc.). While the discourse of the Right (the ‘inegalitarian’) specifies instead that inequalities are ‘natural and, therefore, inevitable,’ and there will always be the strong and weak; the intelligent and unintelligent; the courageous and the lazy; and the responsible and irresponsible.

Further on Bobbio concludes: ‘on behalf of the natural equality,’ on behalf of the fact that under normal and similar circumstances everyone should follow the same path, the egalitarian would condemn social inequality, and ‘in the name of natural inequality, the inegalitarian would condemn social equality.’ But why condemn equality?

De Coorebyter offers us a closer look: the Right does not condemn equality but accepts it ‘conditionally.’ It ‘calls for equal rights or even equal opportunities, equality of citizens before the law,

but it considers that a certain amount of inequality is inevitable and even desirable.' Why? Because these inequalities reflect the 'inequality of effort and merit.' And by virtue of a 'meritocratic principle (...), those who work more or work better should be rewarded' (Author's translation of de Coorebyter, 2010, 17). We should remember here the importance of *merit* and *accountability* in the analysis. It is these two criteria that allow the Right, not in its actions—which is too difficult to verify—but in its rhetoric, to distinguish itself from the Left. If men and women deserve equality at the start, nothing justifies they should be equal at the finish, in particular because this may disappoint and discourage the meritorious among them, and further it could also limit the freedom of those who would 'turned down' against their will for the sake of harmonization in terms of equality.

In the rhetoric from the Right, merit and accountability are established as criteria that are likely separate workers from slackers, the brave from the fearful, the (individually) responsible from those on welfare, these criteria help establish a hierarchy and disparities in behaviours that do not only reveal differences, but also inequalities. And as stated above, the discourse on the Right could establish a wealth distribution system based on these inequalities, following the assumption that those at the top of the hierarchy (the deserving) should have access to collective resources more easily than those at the bottom of the hierarchy (the lazy). Here, *merit* and *accountability* offer a way of rank ordering and a criterion for distribution.

2. 'Producerist' Analysis

If political discourse is clearly tending to the Right in the North and possibly to the Left in the South, then why is this so? To answer this second question, we propose analysing these discourses in light of the 'Producerist' rhetoric found in the United States which revolves around notions of equality and inequality, of merit, of courage or honesty and of straightforwardness. In many respects, we believe that, unlike in Wallonia, this type of discourse has all of the ingredients to ensure its success and effectiveness in Flanders.

The English word 'producerism' should not be translated either into 'productionnisme' or 'productivisme' in French because those two concepts refer to other concepts entirely. According to Berlet and Lyons (2000), producerism is one of the most basic structures of the populist narrative in the United States. Producerism suggests the existence of a noble and hardworking middle class that is constantly in conflict with malicious parasites which are lazy and guilty, and found at both the top and bottom of the social order. The characters and the details have changed repeatedly, but the main features of this conception of things have remained unchanged for nearly two hundred years (Berlet and Lyons, 2000: 348 and 349).

Theorized in the American literature on political groups present in the United States during the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries, Producerism, as described by Berlet and Lyons, refers first to the idea of a productive people, 'the people of producers' (the *producers*). In broad terms, these 'producers' are those responsible for producing all of the wealth of the nation, from growers (farmers) to workers (craftsman), etc. Value creation and the idea of hard work are central tenants here; these producers are identified with the workplace, and hence efficiency, intelligence and especially merit.

The 'producers' are represented in the rhetoric of Producerism as being crushed by a set of 'parasites' made up of individuals who exploit these producers and the fruits of their labour without themselves

participating in the production of the wealth in question. Producerist discourse has the distinction of presenting the productive people as being crushed by two major categories of parasites, ‘parasites from above’ and ‘parasites from below.’

With few exceptions, the parasites from above correspond to the elites as represented in various populist discourses in Europe and throughout the world, ‘capitalists’ for Chavez, ‘globalists’ or ‘internationalists’ for Le Pen, ‘bureaucrats and judges’ for Berlusconi, ‘corrupt trade unionists’ for Thatcher, etc. For their part, the parasites from below refer to a ‘clique’ of lazy people who profit from the system: foreigners, immigrants, welfare recipients, the unemployed and ‘fake’ unemployed, but also ‘outsiders’ of all kinds who also benefit from State resources: subsidized artists, homosexuals, abortion activists, feminists, secular organizations, etc.. Parasites from above and from below the social order are at the heart of the rhetoric of Producerism; they stifle the people who produce the wealth, and they live off of them and at their expense.

The third characteristic of Producerist rhetoric: Producerism maintains the idea that there is solidarity, or failing this, some sort of collusion or tacit agreement between the ‘parasites’ from above and those from below. These are sort of objective allies who do not know each other but who share common interests and a certain complicity. The elitist discourse found in major cities (e.g., Brussels, London, Paris and Washington), who aspire to a cosmopolitanism and a globalization at the same time when immigrants and ‘bogus’ refugees aspire to the disappearance of borders and the free movement of people, illustrates this connivance because these two claims involve different objectives, but which in the end refer to the same reality. The rhetoric of Producerism presents the ‘parasites’ as the protagonists of the same more or less orchestrated bi-product. In this vision, the political elites of Brussels, London and Washington exploit ‘economic’ refugees and all the wretched of the earth to encourage migration, and hence the emergence of multicultural societies. However the narrative is constructed — and they are many — it is every time a question of interests and shared goals between the ‘parasites’ from above and from below; these common interests are contrary to those of the people (the producers).

The Producerism rhetoric found in the United States is a particular category, a specific kind of populism. It borrows from populism the image of an historical and perpetual conflict between those who have power and those who have not; between the financier and the small farmer, between the industrialist and the line worker, between the ‘over-educated and amoral bureaucrats’ and the little people (Kazin, 1998: 1), but the American-style Producerist rhetoric also adds to this image (and to this conflict) a new category of enemies situated at the bottom of the social order.

The rhetoric of Producerism calls into play the figure of the American producer and independent farmer. Historically in the United States, Producerism has glorified the so-called ‘rural radicals’ against the ‘big capitalist monopolies’ (Stock, 1996). Today it is the Tea Party Movement that best embodies the front-and-center return of this rhetoric. The Tea Party emerged at the beginning of the Presidency of Barak Obama; it is a self-identified radical opposition to the federal government, its expenditures, taxes and charges. Their argument is based both on wasteful spending by government leaders and on unearned benefits used by the many recipients of state aid. For example in 2010, the Tea Party was successful in limiting the debate to the American people’s real needs in the area of health around the issue of freedom, including freedom to choose or not a health insurance plan and especially of an insurance company of their choice. In doing so, Republicans close to the Tea Party

were able to give President Obama a Communist label and put in jeopardy his health care reform bill that has now partly, or completely, failed depending from where we consider the changes.

Producerism revolves around the idea of an imminent threat that may be *economic*: ‘the parasites threaten jobs and plunder the government resources, health coverage and social security.’ *Political*: ‘the parasites are the instruments or the protagonists of a hidden agenda that would undermine the unity and homogeneity of the nation. *Moral*: the decadent school, the media, ‘contemporary artists,’ the Liberals (in the American sense of the word) and progressives of all stripes are challenging tradition and moral values. The threat may ultimately be *ethnic*: the mixture of cultures and the multiculturalist ideology threaten identities.

The Producerism model is useful for analysis because it places the value of ‘merit’ and the principle of ‘responsibility’ at the centre of its architecture and in many ways, it can work outside of all forms of radicalism condemned by the law, including racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia. The discourse of Producerism does not challenge people as to what they are (traditional racism) but for what they do; and it does not reject equality for what it stands for, but for the constraints that it can potentially place on meritocratic ideals and on fair distribution of wealth based on merit and accountability. In other words, Producerism glorifies discrimination but skilfully and through the use of criteria that are not prohibited by law: merit, courage, intelligence, responsibility, etc.

The discourse of Producerism is a discourse of the Right that do not condemn equality, but one that assumes it ‘conditionally’ to the extent that certain inequalities reflect the ‘inequality of effort and of merit,’ and that in terms of the meritocratic principle, ‘those who work more or work better should be rewarded’ (de Coorebyter, 2010, 17). In revisiting Bobbio on this last point, we see that the strength of Producerism lies in its ability to go and find not one but two ‘enemies’ in the hierarchy of the traditional Right: the one who is at the bottom for being lazy, and the one at the top who managed to make others believe him to be courageous and hardworking, but who actually owes his success to his ability to manipulate. Adding to the justification for the rejection of the lazy benefactor of collective resources is, with producerism, the rejection of the ‘fake wise guy’ who has managed to pass himself off as exceptionally hard-working, but who in fact is merely a profiteer.

Producerism is a meritocratic doctrine that threatens the weak, lazy and welfare recipients who are unequal and, therefore, are at the bottom of the hierarchy, but also the elite who are as deserving as they are manipulative owing their only salvation to the political machine (clientelism) that they have developed with the weakest members of society. This discourse is an extremely powerful discourse of the Right, but it has no links to the far Right! In that it is intelligent, attractive and dangerous, and, as we will show, proves incredibly effective in the North of Belgium.

3. The Producerist Discourse in Flanders

The merit of the hard-working people, the endeavours of the Flemish vis-à-vis the Walloons, accountability and the pursuit of effectiveness against waste are omnipresent in the discourse of the N-VA; for some time they have structured their discourse notably through including the question of

transfers². On January 7, 2005 a journalist from *La Libre Belgique* reported that twelve ‘trucks (...) took to the roads of Hainaut, allegedly filled with 50 euro notes for a total of €11.3 billion — the amount of transfers North-to-South as the result of a study by the Abafim (Administratie Budgettering, Accounting en Financieel Management), a service of the Ministry of the Flemish Community.’ The journalist explained that the spokesman ‘of the N-VA denied wanting to question the very principle of solidarity with the Walloons, but ‘would rather replace the current system by a real solidarity of Community to Community.’ This would be based on objectivity, transparency and efficiency using the same criteria as those used for the allocation of EU structural funds.’³

If transfers are organized based on criteria related to merit, efficiency and objectivity and are under the control of Flanders, they pose no problems, *a fortiori* if we allow the N-VA to ‘assist and mentor’ the Walloons so that they learn to become independent and that they also make an effort. If, however, it is simply a matter of automatic transfers without any quality assurance and inspection, then it’s a question of a ‘subsidy tap’ and ‘cash cow’. At the N-VA Policy Forum (Planning Conference) of May 19-20, 2007, Bart De Wever stated that Belgium ‘requires great undertakings by the Flemings for this alleged solidarity. The flow of money from Flanders to Wallonia is like a permanent blood transfusion which goes to a patient who is still considerate enough to squeeze our veins. We have had enough.’⁴

The metaphor of the ‘parasitic patient’ refers to a sickened Wallonia whose demands undermine Flanders and, but without killing it, whose survival is a detriment to Flanders; this is characteristic of a parasite. This metaphor is sometimes coupled with the metaphor of the child who is not independent and who needs to learn to be accountable. For example, when De Wever was elected to the Flemish parliament on June 7, 2009, he explained that the Francophones were being ‘bottle-fed by the State.’ Speaking of a baby’s bottle instead of a transfer, of solidarity, or of funding is not by accident even if Geert Bourgeois employs a vocabulary with fewer connotations: ‘The annual financial flow from Flanders to Wallonia has increased to almost 10 billion Euros or 342 billion BEF — an amount far greater than the entire budget for education in Flanders. That too is the tax levied on Flanders, and what does Flanders get in return for that? The blocking of Flemish jurisdictional authority in ‘time credit’ and ‘assurances of autonomy’. Flemish solidarity gets in response a negative solidarity.’⁵

Besides the working (‘producing’) people, there are also some discourses that bring to mind parasites living off of the Flemish people! And Karel Dillen, MEP and chairman of the Vlaams Blok, previously explained in March 1991 that the ‘Walloon parasite has had a custom of being parasitic for over a century and a half.’⁶ More recently, the Deputy Mayor for Finance in La Pagne (Belgium), Serge Van Damme (Open VLD) referred to the arrival of increasingly massive numbers of ‘Walloon parasites’ many ‘CPAS tourist’⁷ who are ‘second generation unemployed, without the slightest sense of responsibility or work ethic.’ The Deputy Mayor went on to say that ‘parents of these tourists have never worked. They themselves do not work.

² I would like to thank Olivier Starquit who helped me to identify and translate the Flemish press sources which I have used here to make my argument.

³ “Les poids lourds de la NV-A à Strépy,” *La Libre Belgique*, 07 January 2005.

⁴ Quoted on the Union belge website : <http://www.unionbelge.be/?p=263>.

⁵ Source: <http://www.n-va.be>.

⁶ *Vlaams Blok Magazine*, March 1991.

⁷ CPAS (or *centre public d'action sociale* in French) provides social assistance and various other forms of support to people residing in Belgium with the goal of giving them the tools to reintegrate back into Belgian society. (<http://www.cpasbru.irisnet.be/>)

*They will never work. These are parasites of democracy. They live off of the CPAS and simply take advantage of the benefits of social security.*⁸

Accused of anti-Walloon racism, the Deputy Mayor hastily explained that his comments were taken out of context, and that he only considered as ‘parasites’ those who abused social security and solidarity. This is an important point because it refers to the power of the discourse of Producerism that can evoke discriminatory notions of work and merit while escaping accusations of racial or ethnic stereotyping. This item also refers to Bobbio and to inequalities as criteria for establishing the distribution of wealth toward the deserving: ‘For them,’ that is to say the parasites, ‘we should have no solidarity’ added Van Damme.

In *Der Spiegel* Bart De Wever indirectly associated Walloons with the parasites, explaining that the money transfers could never be like ‘a drug injection for a junkie.’⁹

The rhetoric of Producerism evokes also the parasites situated in ‘high social order.’ In this regard, for some elected officials on the Right in Flanders, it is no longer Wallonia or Francophones who are the target, but the elected members of the PS—the face *par excellence* of the corrupt elite; the rich Francophones living in the suburbs of Brussels; and the ‘Brussels elite’ who work on Flemish soil, but who dreams of a soulless and rootless cosmopolitan city, where English or French are spoken. The first parasite at the top of the social order is lazy, accused of wasteful spending, and threatens the Flemish worker; the other two types of parasites are accused of endangering Flemish identity and the physical borders that protect it.

As the parasite at the top of the social order, the elected PS is accused of laziness, of corruption and inefficiency, but above all it is accused of allying with the aforementioned parasites at the bottom of the social order. It supports them while owing its survival to the latter through their patronage (clientelism). Here, what is central is the collusion between, on the one hand, the unemployed (or welfare recipients), and on the other, the corrupted official who gives small favours in order to be (re)elected.

For example, as recent as 2010, the website of the N-VA maintains some older quotes like the one of November 1, 2006 entitled: ‘We pay for the rotten PS system.’ Interviewed in *P Magazine* on the scandals affecting Wallonia and the fact that the PS was not sanctioned, Bart De Wever responded: ‘It absolutely does not surprise me. You should see the number of Walloon voters who have an interest in keeping the PS in power. In Seraing, 28 percent of the population lives in public housing. In Charleroi, almost half the population lives on welfare; only 53 percent of the population is currently working, and of those 53 percent, 39 percent work in public service. The PS system is based on a political patronage similar to that of Eastern Europe. And Walloon voters applaud as the bill is paid by the Flemish...We Flemish pay for this system. We maintain it through our annual transfers to Wallonia. It's like bringing water to the sea. It is noble to reach out to those weaker than us and help them through a bad patch, but the PS does not wish to improve the situation; it wants the situation remains as it is. It has an interest in having many people depend on the state, and, therefore, the PS.’¹⁰

⁸ Among others, see *Le Vif* and *RTBF* on the web (2010 30th and 31th of December).

⁹ *Der Spiegel*, 13 December 2010.

¹⁰ Source: www.n-va.be/citaten/wij-betalen-voor-het-rotte-ps-systeem.

The rhetoric of 'the PS State' ('L'Etat-PS') is highly developed in the rhetoric of the Right, especially in the VB (*Vlaams Belang*). Thus, in an 'Open Letter to Bart De Wever,' Bruno Valkeniers (current president of the VB) explained on October 16, 2010 that the deadlock had 'never been so pronounced, simply because the true motives have become clear: the PS-State will never tolerate the Flemish cash cow to have its own stable; the milk will always flow southward through an artificial pipeline.' The following year, on January 27, 2011, Guy D'Haeseleer (*Vlaams Belang*) and his associates filed a motion for a resolution on the resolution of the division of social security: 'Only then will Walloon politicians feel the need to drastically reverse the current trend and, eventually make some difficult decisions. This will free Wallonia from the iron rule of statism and cronyism that characterized the PS-State and will return State pride to the people of Wallonia.'¹¹

The principle of solidarity between the parasites of the top and of the bottom is fundamental in the rhetoric of Producerism, and demonstrates a highly effective discourse on the Right. It has the quality of explaining and linking, in a simple and clear manner, complex ideas which may otherwise be unrelated. Thus, the reasons for the electoral success of the PS; the difficulty of internal party reform; the nature of North-to-South transfers; the problems of unemployment, (job) insecurity and poverty in Wallonia; economic redevelopment in Wallonia; and other issues are being assembled behind a single and compelling explanation.

In a statement entitled, 'The Socialist Party is having a party at Flemish taxpayers' expense' (August 6, 2006), not without cynicism, Frank Vanhecke of *Vlaams Belang* illustrates in detail the waste of public money by PS politicians in the name of electioneering and cronyism: 'Tomorrow is the start of the Giro, the Tour of Italy beginning in...Wallonia (in Seraing). Seven Walloon cities will be visited in all. According to the Walloon Region, the cost is no less than €1.317.500. The choice of starting and stopping points is at least interesting. Many Italians live in Seraing. Charleroi is the basis of the Socialist Jean-Claude Van Cauwenberghe. Namur is the capital of Wallonia. Chairman of PS Elio Di Rupo lives in Mons. Wanze is the municipality of Gaston Gerard (PS), MPP of Liège in charge of sports. Perwez is the municipality where André Antoine (CDH), Walloon Minister of Economy, is the *bourgmestre*. Finally, Hotton is where Philippe Courard (PS), the Walloon Minister of Internal Affairs, lives. These and other dignitaries of the Walloon PS State will be all smiles at the podium in the coming days. They will be celebrating with the money that comes mostly from Flemish and European taxpayers; money that should be helping the bankrupt Walloon economy to bounce back, and not to put politicians in the limelight. These Walloon stages of the Giro are an obscene form of monetary waste. (...) With the exception of the catering industry in seven Walloon municipalities—each for one day—the Giro is of no economic importance in Wallonia. *Vlaams Belang* will ask the European Commission if EU funds were used for this 'bread and circuses' project.'¹²

The rhetoric of Producerism on the Right in Flanders calls to mind elected PS officials as well as the Francophones of wealthy Brussels suburbs, and the elites of the European Union. If the first is wasting public money for 'their clients', the other two types of 'parasites' are accused of endangering the Flemish identity and physical borders that protect it. Here, it is no longer the concepts of accountability, efficiency and merit that are mobilized to discredit the 'PS State', but the Flemish notion of *inburgering* (settling) used to 'protect themselves' against the French-speaking and

¹¹ Source: <http://www.lachambre.be/FLVWB/pdf/53/1127/53K1127001.pdf>.

¹² Franck Vanhecke, former *Vlaams Belang* Chairman. Source : <http://www.doorbraak.org/nieuws/34/met-ons-kun-je-praten>.

European elites who covet some municipalities. The local integration strategy introduces a special condition for the sale of certain lands and buildings constructed upon them. Only people with a 'sufficient connection' with the municipality can buy the land and buildings: 'A person is considered to have a sufficient connection with the municipality if they meet one or more of the following conditions: (1) Have been a resident of the municipality or a neighbouring municipality for at least six years without interruption (provided that the municipality is on the list of municipalities where a policy of local integration is applied); (2) Perform activities (an average of at least half a working week) in the municipality; (3) Have built a societal, familial, social or economic relationship with the municipality on the basis of a substantial and long-term nature.'¹³ If the criterion of merit enables the exclusion of the lazy elite, the 'local integration strategies' are able to exclude French speaking citizens and European elites.

All elements of the rhetoric of Producerism are present in the political discourse of the Right in Flanders. We find the parasite from below, the parasite from above, the solidarity between them, the idea of hard work, the idea merit and the idea of responsibility. All this refers to the idea of people being squeezed; a people suffocating, according to the slogan of the N-VA: 'Laat niet verstrikken Vlaanderen,' literally: 'Do not let Flanders choke.'

Previously we saw that the rhetoric of Producerism found in the American Tea Party (Movement) skilfully made references to communism. Bart De Wever has had several opportunities to also make this type of reference. Thus, he could say (as seen above) that 'The PS system is based on a political patronage similar to that of Eastern Europe.' And in *Het Nieuwsblad* of October 21, 2004, he denounced the financial flows 'from Wallonia to Flanders [which] are higher than we thought.' He added: 'We Flemish, give [to Wallonia] more than West Germany gave to the GDR.'¹⁴

We indicated at the beginning of this text that it was not so far the discourse in Wallonia that was turning to the Left than the discourse in Flanders that was turning to the Right. All that we have presented here has indicated a move rightward in the political discourse in Flanders, and it is legitimate to ask why we are witnessing such a difference between the South and the North in Belgium.

First observation: The fact that it is very difficult to stir up a discourse of Producerism in the South of the country explains a great deal. If the idea of the parasite profiteer such as the unemployed or the immigrant is not absent from some political discourses in the South, notably that of the *Mouvement réformateur*, *Parti populaire* and in small political parties of the extreme right, it is very difficult to position in Wallonia such a discourse in a more complex logic of collusion with their fellow parasites of both the top and bottom of the social order, and further to integrate the whole in the context of the 'conflict communautaire'. The argument of a 'PS State' exists in some of the discourses found in the South, but it is less effective because it implicitly discredits different coalition partners — that is to say, the other major parties which work with the PS — regarded as incapable to change the course of politics, and under the tutelage of the powerful Socialist Party (PS) : talking about 'PS State' for a coalition partner means admitting its own weakness or dependency. On the other hand, the argument of a 'PS State' can, under no circumstances, be used by politicians in the South as an

¹³ The *inburgering* decree : <http://www.rwo.be/Default.aspx?tabid=12339>.

¹⁴ Source: <http://www.nieuwsblad.be/article/detail.aspx?articleid=GPO9LL21>.

argument to justify the responsibility of the Flemish vis-à-vis a fair number of problems. It simply does not work.

The mounting rhetoric of Producerism is significantly less effective in a French-speaking Belgium satisfied with the status quo regarding state reform and, by its increasingly francophone nature, concerned little with Brussels and its periphery.

Second observation: the discourse of Producerism works better in Flanders than in Wallonia because it can take advantage of populism's classic formula. As a discourse praising the people against the elite, populism has the distinction of replacing the so-called 'artificial Left / Right divide' with an opposition between those who adhere to the system and those who reject it. With the idea of 'big government spending,' and the idea of a federal government 'against' Flanders, the Flemish Right can seamlessly integrate communitarian issues in classic opposition found in populist discourse ('the people' against 'the system'). However, this approach is fundamentally impossible in Wallonia, where the 'federal state' is considered as the guarantor of a number of mechanisms of solidarity and hence stability. The federal system is perceived of as the protector of the South, and can in no way be part of a populist-styled discourse.

Conclusion

Does this line of argument pose a problem? Not if we restrict ourselves to the Flemish context. However, it would be a problem if we expand this argument to the entire Belgian context, particularly in terms of solidarity and redistribution of wealth based on responsibility, courage and merit.

The Producerist model that drives the discourse on the Right in Flanders aims to propose solutions to the adverse consequences of the market without calling into question the very principles of the market, of free competition or globalization. It is a model that attempts to protect Flemish cultural and linguistic identity as well as the well-being of its people in terms of access to resources without yielding to an expensive and wasteful 'state egalitarianism' found in the socialist model of Belgium's South. By limiting the (potential) number of beneficiaries of solidarity on the basis of criteria linked to attachment or integration (*inburgering*), merit and accountability, the discourse of Producerism offers to maintain broad individual freedoms, particularly economic freedoms, while providing a range of protections in terms of access to resources, but also protecting language and culture. The 'integrated worthy people' can then play it both ways: playing the game of international competition while benefiting from a social security system; enjoying a strong free enterprise all the while being covered by a sort of regional solidarity accessible only via strict criteria.

The Producerist model limits the (potential) number of beneficiaries of social protections without eliminating them all together, while leaving the liberal strand within the reach of the strongest, the most daring and most deserving. It is the Right's advocacy of this strange marriage between attachment (*inburgering*) and merit in Flanders, the latter which preserve the standard neoliberal credo in an unequal Europe in crisis. If it hopes to have a future in the regional Flemish context in the heart of Europe where there is increasing competition between regions, in its current form it is fundamentally incompatible with the Belgian federal system and the mechanisms of solidarity which characterize it today.

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