

The Making of Flemings and Walloons: Belgium: 1830-1914

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The Making of Flemings and Walloons:

Belgium: 1830–1914 Are there any Belgians, or merely Flemings and Walloons in a state of conflict? As a leading newspaper put it on 10 August 1830, “The Belgians have a nationality which one can ignore only by repudiating the extensive evidence of their history and by taking into account none of the numerous characteristics they still display today.”¹ Whatever evidence the past may have afforded, events of subsequent months transformed this statement into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Belgium emerged as an independent state which, notwithstanding its linguistic heterogeneity, rapidly acquired the most stable regime in continental Europe. On the eve of World War I, however, the historical evidence could be read very differently. Writing in an atmosphere of increasing contention, one spokesman informed the King: “No, Sire, there is no such thing as a Belgian soul. The fusion of Flemings and Walloons is not to be desired and, if one were to desire it, one would have to admit that it is not possible.”² What of it, then? The two statements need not be mutually exclusive. It is not that there were Belgians in 1830 and only Flemings and

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1 Quoted in Paul Harsin, *Essai sur l'opinion publique en Belgique de 1815 à 1830* (Charleroi, n.d.), 72.

2 Quoted in Shephard Clough, *A History of the Flemish Movement in Belgium: A Study in Nationalism* (New York, 1930), 128.

Walloon in 1912, but rather that the linguistic segmentation which characterized the country from the very beginning underwent a significant transformation in the course of socioeconomic and political development in the nineteenth century.

The present analysis, which seeks to set the Belgian record straight by reconstructing as precisely as possible on the basis of census data and other quantitative information the changing linguistic situation in Belgium and the relationships of these changes to political, economic, and social features of Belgian society, therefore challenges propositions concerning the waning of traditional attachments, primordial ties, or parochialisms that are found in conventional theories of social and political development. This challenge entails as well a critique of an approach that is widespread in contemporary political science and sociology, whereby culture is considered as an “independent variable” in relation to political ideas, structures, and processes. Much as did traditional historians of nationalism, social scientists tend to view segmentations such as the one found in Belgium as “cultural givens” which, in retrospect, naturally shaped the path of a country’s history to the present.³ In contrast, it is suggested here that the consequences of cultural segmentations are not predetermined and that their impact is mediated by other cultural factors, especially the more or less coherent and manifest ideologies of collective political actors which function as “changing definitions of the situation.”⁴ Culture is not a “given” for the further reason that with respect to numerous attributes often considered “ascriptive” rather than “achieved,” individuals can and constantly do change their characteristics. As the present interpretation suggests that both kinds of change can be understood as choices made by individuals and groups who seek to reduce “costs,” it addresses itself as well to the widespread belief that cultural interests are inherently “irrational” and therefore necessarily produce unmanageable and

3 For example, Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan (eds.), *Party Systems and Voter Alignments* (New York, 1967), 1–64.

4 For a more thorough discussion of the approach with an application to the analysis of contemporary Africa, see the author’s “Patterns of National Integration: The Cases of Mali and the Ivory Coast,” *Journal of Modern African Studies*, V (1967), 449–467. The analysis of the African cases as well as the present one owe much to Clifford Geertz’s seminal papers, “The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States,” in Clifford Geertz (ed.), *Old Societies and New States* (New York, 1963), 104–157; “Ideology as a Cultural System,” in David E. Apter (ed.), *Ideology and Discontent* (New York, 1964), 46–76.

intense forms of political conflict.⁵ In short, at a time when the manifestations of “obscure primordial forces” produce fearsome headlines, the Belgian case illustrates how tribes can arise even in civilized societies and why war does not always follow in their wake.

The first national census of Belgium, conducted in 1846, provides the most precise starting point for an analysis of the language situation after the newly independent country had acquired the political boundaries it was to maintain, with minor modifications following World

Table 1 Population Distribution in 1846

PROVINCE	%	%	INHAB.	% LANGUAGE USERS		
				POPULATION	AREA	PER KM ²
Antwerp	9.4	9.6	143	97.5	1.7	0.8
West Flanders	14.8	11.0	199	94.5	5.3	0.2
East Flanders	18.3	10.2	265	98.3	1.7	—
Limburg	4.3	8.2	77	94.9	5.0	0.1
Total	46.8	39.0	177	96.6	3.2	0.2
Brabant	15.9	11.1	211	67.6	31.9	0.4
Hainaut	16.5	12.6	192	2.9	97.0	0.5
Liège	10.4	9.8	157	4.6	94.4	1.0
Luxemburg	4.3	15.0	42	0.4	85.8	13.8
Namur	6.1	12.4	72	0.6	99.4	0.1
Total	37.3	49.8	110	2.7	95.4	1.9
Kingdom	100	100	147	57.0	42.1	0.9
N	4,337,196			2,471,248	1,827,141	38,807 ^a

SOURCE: Percentages computed from numerical data in: Belgium, Ministry of Interior, *Statistique Générale de la Belgique. Exposé de la Situation du Royaume (Période Décennale de 1841-1850)* (Brussels, 1852), Title II, 10-11, 18.

a Of these, 34,060 used German.

⁵ See, for example, Robert Dahl (ed.), *Political Opposition in the Western Democracies* (New Haven, 1966), 357; Eric A. Nordlinger, *Conflict Regulation in Divided Societies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972).

War I, down to the present. To the question “Which language do you usually speak?” the possible answers were “French or Walloon,” “Flemish or Dutch,” “German,” “English,” or “Other.” As Table I indicates, out of the total population of nearly 4.4 million, 57 percent were recorded as speaking “Flemish or Dutch,” 42 percent “French or Walloon,” and about 1 percent another language, mostly German.

The population was unevenly distributed among nine provinces of uneven area. Their linguistic attributes reflected the fact that Belgium straddled a slightly jagged line, running from Aachen to Calais, which had delineated since the early Middle Ages a northern zone of Germanic speech from a southern zone of Romance speech.⁶ Hence, although the country itself was linguistically heterogeneous, most of its inhabitants lived in an environment that was fairly homogeneous from a linguistic point of view. More than 95 percent of the population of Antwerp, West Flanders, East Flanders, and Limburg, provinces whose territory lay almost entirely north of the line, spoke “Flemish or Dutch”; this was also the case for two districts (*arrondissements*) of Brabant Province, Louvain and Brussels, with the exception of the capital city and its immediate surroundings. Together, these four provinces and the two districts will be referred to as the “Flemish region,” a descriptive designation which had no legal or administrative standing at the time. Brussels District contained the capital city, whose heart was located about ten miles north of the language line. Of the population in Brussels Commune proper (2.6 percent of the national total), 38 percent spoke “French or Walloon” and 61 percent “Flemish or Dutch” according to a detailed census conducted in 1842; a similar situation was found in the capital’s growing suburbs.⁷ Nivelles, the remaining district of Brabant, as well as the provinces of Hainaut, Liège, Luxemburg, and Namur, were located almost entirely south of the language line and can be referred to as the “Walloon region,” where more than 95 percent of the population spoke “French or Walloon.” Luxemburg contained a German-speaking minority (14 percent of its population), but the minority was very small in relation to the national population.

6 Concerning the origins of this line, a subject of passionate controversy in Belgium for half a century, Jean Stengers has persuasively argued that since too many hypotheses are possible to interpret the facts that have randomly survived, it is not a legitimate subject for historical inquiry; see “La Formation de la frontière linguistique en Belgique . . .” in *Collection Latomus* (Brussels, 1959), XLI, 51–53.

7 J. Kruithof, “De Samenstelling der Brusselse bevolking in 1842. Proeve tot opbouw der sociale stratificatie” in *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Wetenschappen*, 3 (1956), 159–221.

It is very difficult to extricate the realities of the language situation at that time, as they might have been recorded by detached professional observers, from the realities as they were perceived and defined by Belgian authorities since it is *their* realities which were recorded in the census.⁸ Everyone in Belgium was recorded as speaking one language and one language only; infants and deaf-mutes were classified with their families; no provision was made for multilinguals; and there were no uniform criteria to assign multilingual individuals to one or the other census category. Individuals who did not choose between “Flemish or Dutch” and “French or Walloon” were automatically classified according to the presumed language of their place of birth; if it was Brussels, they spoke “Flemish or Dutch” if born in the lower, proletarian part of the city, and “French or Walloon” if born in the upper part. The census thus created an erroneous image of a segmentation into two mutually exclusive language groups, reinforced by the amalgamation of varying regional speeches into a single “Flemish or Dutch” category, and the entirely inappropriate confusion of “Walloon”—itself a loose label covering distinct Romance speeches—with French.

Hence, a more accurate description of the language situation in the middle third of the nineteenth century would be as follows: A majority of the population, located north of the language line, spoke mostly varieties of Flemish; most of the remainder, located south of the line, spoke varieties of Walloon and Picard; in both regions, a fraction of the people had acquired some rudiments of French. Only a small minority, scattered in the urban centers south and north of the line, used standard French as its usual language. But this minority was the upper stratum of Belgian society. Since it constituted the country’s political class, its cultural choices were determinative during the period of the founding.

That the language segmentation found in Belgium had a sociological dimension was noted by contemporaneous observers. The author of an early social survey (1838) stated, for example: “French is the language used in public affairs and by the well-off classes; among the Flemish and German populations, all educated persons as well as

8 These and other useful methodological comments concerning the censuses from 1846 to 1930 are discussed in Paul M. G. Levy, “La Statistique des langues en Belgique,” *Revue de l’Institut de Sociologie* (Brussels), XVIII (1938), 507–570. See also *idem*, *La Querelle du Recensement* (Brussels, 1960); “Quelques problèmes de statistique linguistique,” *Revue de l’Institut de Sociologie*, XXXVIII (1964), 251–273.

many middle-class persons, speak or understand French.”⁹ It is nevertheless very difficult to provide quantitative evidence for this well-established fact. Before we attempt to do so, however, it is important to distinguish the Belgian situation from others in which a linguistic segmentation coincides with a differentiation between urban and rural cultures. In Belgium the “French or Walloon” speakers as a whole were not more urban than those who spoke “Flemish or Dutch.” According to each of three criteria available in the 1846 statistical survey, the Flemish provinces were more urban than the Walloon; and whereas 57.5 percent of the Belgian-born population spoke “Flemish or Dutch,” 63.9 percent of the one-fourth of the Belgian-born inhabitants of municipalities defined as urban by the administration belonged to that language group.¹⁰ The sociological dimension of the linguistic differentiation found in Belgium was thus not simply an urban-rural one, but rather one which combined urban residence with class. For example, a detailed study of neighborhoods and even of individual streets in Brussels, where only 37.5 percent of the population gave “French or Walloon” as its spoken language in 1842, concludes that, although there was a “French” proletarian section in the southern part of the city, on the whole the bourgeois neighborhoods and streets were much more French-speaking and the working class ones much more Flemish.¹¹ Unfortunately, there has been little or no monographic research on the subject as a whole. What follows is therefore a very tentative account, based on an analysis of language minorities in the Flemish and Walloon provinces, described statistically in Table 2.

Leaving aside residents born in France and in the Netherlands, 2.6 percent of the population of the four Flemish provinces spoke French, and an equal percentage of the Walloon provinces spoke Flemish. But there were significant structural differences between the two minorities. French speakers in the Flemish provinces were more urban (38.6 percent lived in urban communes) than their counterparts in the south (26.7 percent). Although these minorities diverged about

9 Quoted in Levy, “Quelques problèmes,” 253.

10 Belgium, Ministry of Interior, *Statistique Générale de la Belgique. Exposé de la Situation du Royaume (Période Décennale de 1841–1850)* (Brussels, 1852), Title II, 6–11, hereafter cited as *Exposé* (1852); Benoît Verhaegen, *Contribution à l’Histoire Economique des Flandres* (Louvain, 1961), II, 14. Detailed tables are omitted for lack of space. The three criteria are: Municipalities defined as urban for administrative purposes; municipalities with population of 10,000 and over; and municipalities with population of 25,000 and over.

11 Kruithof, “De Samenstelling,” 220.

Table 2 Belgian-born Linguistic Minorities in 1846^a

A. French/Walloon Speakers in Four Flemish Provinces							
	URBAN		RURAL		TOTAL		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Male	12,531	23.4	16,733	31.3	29,264	54.7	
Female	8,127	15.2	16,067	30.1	24,194	45.3	
Total	20,658	38.6	32,800	61.4	53,458	100.0	
Sex Ratio	154		104				
% Total Pop.:					2.6		
B. Flemish/Dutch Speakers in Four Walloon Provinces							
	URBAN		RURAL		TOTAL		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Male	8,060	19.5	15,687	37.9	23,747	57.4	
Female	2,977	7.2	14,691	35.5	17,668	42.7	
Total	11,037	26.7	30,378	73.4	41,415	100 ^b	
Sex Ratio	271		107				
% Total Pop.:					2.6		

SOURCE: *Exposé* (1852), Title II, 6–11.

a Individuals born in France and in the Netherlands have been subtracted from language sets.

b Percentages do not always add up to 100 due to rounding.

equally from the overall urban-rural distribution in each group of provinces, in absolute numbers, the ratio of urban, French speakers in the North to Flemish speakers in the South was about two to one (N = 20,658 and 11,037). Leaving Brussels and Brabant aside, nearly half of the urban French speakers in the Flemish provinces lived in the cities of Ghent and Antwerp, concentrations with no equivalent south of the language line. Furthermore, although the sex ratios (number of men per 100 women) for both minorities are slightly higher than for the majority language group in the rural communes of each group

of provinces, and considerably higher in the urban communes, the sex ratio of Flemish speakers in Walloon urban communes is extraordinarily high, showing nearly three times more Flemish-speaking men than women. Not only were French speakers in Flanders more urban and more concentrated, but these larger urban communities probably contained a much larger component of settled families than among Flemish speakers in the South. The limited data presented here are therefore consistent with the proposition found in much of the historical literature that aside from the minorities scattered along the language line, the French-speaking minority in the Flemish provinces consisted to a large extent of indigenous families of higher social status who had become assimilated into French culture, as well as of officials on assignment in that region, while Flemish speakers in the Walloon provinces were much more likely to belong to the working class, like the many single men and families engaged in mining and heavy industry in Hainaut and Liège. It is very likely that the correlation between language and class found in Brussels was replicated on a lesser scale in Antwerp, Ghent, and in smaller cities of the North.

It is not necessary to assume the existence of “a Belgian nationality” to account for the emergence of Belgium in 1830. The formation of a Belgian political community is attributable to secular processes which stemmed from decisions made mostly outside the region but which, on balance, subjected it to common political experiences; and its gain of political independence at that time comes from an interplay between the inclinations of a large segment of the regional political class, founded on their specific interests, and the contemporaneous international system. The sociological dimension of the linguistic segmentation explains, more than any other factor, why language differences played a minimal political role during the country’s formative years. United by a regional patriotism directed against both the Netherlands and France, the Belgian political class experienced little difficulty in establishing, in a culturally diverse country where a majority spoke Flemish and most of the others Walloon, a unitary regime whose sole official language was French.

The process of consolidation of the Low Countries, an area which encompassed contemporary Benelux and part of Northern France, began in the fourteenth century and was completed in 1543, when it was governed as a dependency of Spain under a system which resembled the modern colonial pattern of indirect rule. But the upheavals of the

second half of the sixteenth century had as their outcome the establishment of an armistice line which separated the independent United Provinces north of the river deltas from the southern provinces which, with the exception of Liège (attached to the Holy Roman Empire) were reconquered by Spain. The armistice line which, with minor modifications, became a permanent political boundary for two centuries, was drawn *north* of the linguistic line, thus leaving a substantial Flemish-speaking population in what became known as the Spanish Low Countries. Although it is not clear to what extent the regions north and south of the linguistic line constituted distinct cultures or societies prior to the end of the sixteenth century—a controversial historical subject toward the end of the period covered in this paper and to which we shall return—it is certain that the political boundary settled at that time determined separate development of the independent and Spanish Netherlands for two eventful centuries.

Whatever the religious orientation of various geographical and sociological components of the southern provinces may have been in the sixteenth century, Catholicism was brutally reimposed by Spain in the seventeenth century. After losing part of their southern territory to France, the Spanish Low Countries, as a distinct political unit containing a homogeneous Catholic but linguistically diverse population, came under Austrian control at the beginning of the eighteenth century. From about 1750, as part of a strategy of modernization from above, the Austrians developed in their westernmost possession, which had already shown signs of economic development, an elaborate network of administrative, judicial, and religious bureaucracies, with a system of secondary education designed to facilitate recruitment of appropriate personnel from the ranks of the nobility and the bourgeoisie. The language which they used for these activities was French.¹² As these policies produced a spurt of economic development, the new bourgeoisie, even in the major cities north of the language line such as Brussels, Ghent, and Antwerp, increasingly adopted the French language and culture promoted by a German court as their own. After an abortive revolution (1789–1790), during which the “United Belgian Provinces”—including Liège, separated from the rest for two centuries—emerged briefly as a state claiming international sovereignty, the region was annexed by France (1795) and transformed into nine

12 See A. Cosemans, “Taaltoestanden historisch gezien. Het onderwijs,” *Handelingen der Koninklijke Zuidnederlandse Maatschappij voor Taalen letterkunde en geschiedenis*, 8 (1953), 117–156.

departments.¹³ The economic, administrative, and cultural transformations launched by the Austrians were vastly reinforced during nearly twenty years of French occupation. By 1814, French was the common language of Belgian elites, regardless of their sphere of activity and region of origin or of residence; it was also, therefore, the language of upward mobility.¹⁴

Had France prevailed, the use of Flemish in the Belgian departments might have waned considerably during the nineteenth century under the impact of a determined French commitment to cultural and linguistic homogeneity as the *sine qua non* of national integration, as occurred in many parts of France itself with respect to Flemish, Breton, or Provençal. As it was, however, the nine departments were incorporated into the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1815 as part of the Vienna settlement. The intense period of French assimilation was thus followed by a fifteen-year period during which the Belgian region was ruled by a Dutch government which also aspired to achieve linguistic homogeneity, but in the region's other language. Less forceful than the French, however, the Dutch were also aware that their linguistic aspirations went against a well-established trend among Belgian elites. They concentrated intermittently on the official establishment of Dutch north of the language line, a zone which included Brussels, and introduced Dutch into the curriculum of secondary and higher education.¹⁵ On the whole, ideological divisions among Belgian elites and their differentiated economic interests played a more important role in defining the positions of various groups toward the Netherlands regime and its policies than did residence in the Flemish or Walloon region of Belgium. Although the Church and political Catholics actively opposed the Protestant and Masonic Dutch establishment from the very beginning, mostly because of its educational policies, the industrial and commercial bourgeoisie of the major cities—many of whom were themselves Masons and had been pro-French—saw the reconstitution of the Low Countries as a great opportunity for economic development and for religious liberalization.

13 Robert R. Palmer's interesting account of the Belgian revolution cast in a comparative context, *The Age of Democratic Revolution* (Princeton, 1959), has been criticized by J. Craeybeckx, "The Brabant Revolution: A Conservative Revolt in a Backward Country?" *Acta Historiae Neerlandica*, IV (1970), 49–83.

14 J. H. Elias, *Geschiedenis van de Vlaamse Gedachte, 1780–1914* (Antwerp, 1963–1965), I, *passim*.

15 See A. De Jonghe, *De Taalpolitiek van Koning Willem I in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden (1814–1830)* (St. André-Bruges, 1967; 1st edn., Brussels, 1943).

Both Catholics and Liberals, as they were then commonly identified, steadily opposed intermittent attempts to extend the official language of the Netherlands to the southern part of the realm, and particularly to Brussels.

In the second half of the 1820s, there was a rapprochement between a new generation of liberal Catholics and a new generation of Liberal freethinkers, more concerned with political freedom than with economic development. At the end of the decade, a “Union of Oppositions” was able to channel the popular discontent produced by economic dislocations accompanying economic development into opposition to Dutch rule.¹⁶ The July Revolution in France gave the Belgians an opportunity to exert greater pressure on behalf of a liberalization of the regime and of administrative autonomy for the south. Dutch reactions to upheavals in Belgium during August and September, 1830, contributed to the transformation of more limited demands into a declaration of independence. Claiming authority over the area encompassed by the nine former French departments, the Belgian Provisional Government obtained some support among English Whigs and thereby was reluctantly granted *de facto* recognition by the European powers at the end of the year. Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, the British candidate, became King of the Belgians in July, 1831. A Dutch onslaught one month later was repelled with French assistance. In 1839, Belgium obtained *de jure* recognition in exchange for a settlement which entailed, among other things, a loss of about 7 percent of its population, mostly Flemish and German speakers. In spite of its vulnerable geopolitical location, Belgium became a neutral European island whose territorial integrity was founded on international law and the balance of power.

What united the diverse elements which led the Belgian Revolution has been identified by Stengers as “Belgian patriotism,” a concrete sentiment founded on different motives among various groups, whose geographical and sociological diffusion in the course of the struggle against the Netherlands he has traced.¹⁷ It was probably strongest among the popular and middle classes in Brussels, where the upheaval started, as well as in Liège and other Walloon towns, but it was also

16 On the Union and the Revolution more generally, see Robert Demoulin, *La Révolution de 1830* (Brussels, 1950).

17 See Jean Stengers, “Sentiment national, sentiment orangiste et sentiment français à l’aube de notre indépendance,” *Revue Belge de Philologie et d’Histoire*, XXVIII (1950), 994–1027; XXIX (1951), 66–90.

widespread in the rural areas and in the Flemish provinces which supported the national revolution once it got under way. Stengers found that only a small segment of opinion within the political class—mostly in the Walloon cities of Verviers, Liège, and Mons—advocated reunion with France in 1830, and that the more important segment—especially strong in the two leading industrial and commercial cities of the Flemish region, Ghent and Antwerp, but evident also in Brussels and even in Liège—remained loyal to the House of Orange. “Reunionism” disappeared rapidly, while “Orangism” lasted. It is unlikely, however, that the latter was based principally upon linguistic and cultural affinity with the Netherlands. Almost entirely French-speaking, the Orangists feared the negative economic consequences of separation and the dominant position which the Catholic Church was likely to achieve in an independent Belgium.¹⁸ The distribution of opinion found by Stengers is confirmed by Witte’s more recent quantitative study of communal (municipal) politics in the twenty largest Belgian towns from 1830 to 1850.¹⁹ Although she is not particularly concerned with regional distribution, her data show that in the communal (municipal) elections of October and November, 1830, the “revolutionaries” were clearly dominant in nine out of the fifteen towns located north of the language line, and in two of the five in the south. There were no Reunionists north of the language line, but there were Orangists as well as Reunionists south of it. Thus, we can conclude that Belgian patriotism was widespread among the urban upper strata, regardless of region; but among those who opposed the national revolution, northerners remained pro-Dutch while some southerners were pro-French. The evidence suggests as well that Orangism was a local version of “legitimismo,” a defensive strategy of established elites against the political and social aspects of the national revolution which threatened their position in Belgian towns and cities.

There was another category of Orangists, however, for whom loyalism to the Netherlands had a different meaning. Occurring after the most intensive period of French linguistic and cultural penetration,

18 This is acknowledged by even such an engagé Flemish historian as Elias (*Geschiedenis*, I, 396–400). See also the summary chapter on the nineteenth century in A. W. Willemsen, *Het Vlaams Nationalisme* (Utrecht, 1969), 10–27.

19 Els Witte, “Politieke Machtstrijd in en om de voornaamste Belgische steden, 1830–1848” (Doctoraats-Verhandeling, Rijksuniversiteit Gent, Faculteit letteren en Wijsbegeerte, Groep Geschiedenis, 1970), 3v., mimeo. I am grateful to Witte for making her dissertation available. My analysis is based on the data which she presents in I, Tables III, IV.

Dutch rule revealed to the secular-minded urban middle strata of the northern part of Belgium—lawyers, schoolteachers, and middle- and lower-level government officials—the hitherto almost unsuspected, or actively repressed, existence of a modern literary and scientific culture in a standardized language almost identical to what was regarded as a mere “dialect” in Belgium. This exposure, together with such institutional innovations as the founding of a Dutch-language teacher-training college in Flanders, and the inclusion of Dutch literature in the curricula of state universities, provided the conditions for the emergence of a small cohort of Flemish-minded intellectuals, pejoratively called *Flamingants*, soon after Belgian independence.²⁰ For them, Orangism was more a matter of national identity. But the very connection between Flemish-mindedness and Dutch loyalism as well as the non-bourgeois status of its advocates, reduced what little political leverage the *Flamingants* might otherwise have had on Belgian politics during the period of the national founding.

The Belgian founders translated their unusual coalition into a contractual formula for parliamentary government that was unique on the Continent. Far from democratic since it was based on restricted political participation, the regime was nevertheless amazingly liberal for its time.²¹ Alongside freedom of religion, of education, of association, and of the press—all of which reflected compromises between Catholic and Liberal “Unionists”—the Belgian Constitution stated in Article 23 that “The use of the languages spoken in Belgium is optional; it may be regulated by law and only in the case of acts by the public authorities and of judicial matters.”²² But this constitutionally guaranteed freedom of linguistic usage, which implicitly acknowledged the country’s linguistic diversity, was accompanied by the political class’ unambiguous adherence to the view that Belgium, as a national state, must be a unilingual, francophonic entity. Immediately after it declared that Belgium was independent, the Provisional Government decreed that French was the only official language of Belgium; after the Constitution was adopted, Parliament repeatedly passed laws

20 Clough, *History*, 86; Elias, *Geschiedenis*, I, “Conclusions.”

21 For a more detailed analysis see the author’s “Political Development in Belgium: Crises and Process” (unpub. ms., 1972; forthcoming in a volume edited by Raymond Grew). The best overview in any language is Val Lorwin, “Belgium: Religion, Class and Language in National Politics” in Dahl, *Political Opposition*, 147–184, 409–416.

22 The constitutional text is given in Robert Senelle, “The Revision of the Constitution, 1967–1970,” *Memo from Belgium*, 128–129 (Brussels, 1970), 127.

confirming this decision.²³ These acts constituted more than an ordinary choice between alternative policies: They politicized in a fundamental way the language situation in Belgium. They can be accounted for, in part, by the anti-Dutch content of Belgian patriotism; but they also reflected and confirmed the class aspects of the language situation.

A detailed examination of the allocation of seats in the various Belgian representative bodies from 1830 to 1847, as well as of the electorate for those bodies (omitted here for lack of space), demonstrates that although there was no discrimination against the Flemish region, there is a strong probability that the political class, regardless of the language dominant in their constituencies, were of French culture.²⁴ There were nearly enough Belgian-born, French-speaking adult males in the provinces north of the language line to fill the entire "registered electorate" set in 1847, the first year for which this estimate can be attempted. This was the case in the urban communes of three out of the four provinces; in the rural communes, there were more French-speaking adults than registered electors in two of the four provinces but considerably fewer in the other two. Additional information on Brussels, which had about 20,000 French-speaking adult males and 2,000 voters in 1847, indicates that most voters lived in the French-speaking bourgeois districts.²⁵ Although it cannot be inferred from this type of ecological data that the electorate qualified to vote for national elections in the Flemish provinces was exclusively French-speaking (in the census sense), the data are consistent with the likelihood, based on an overall understanding of the language situation, that this was the case. Since elected representatives were of even higher social status, there is little doubt of their cultural orientation.

The French-speaking ruling strata believed as much as did their counterparts in the Netherlands or in France that a unilingual center was necessary for the achievement of a national state. French became the sole language of public affairs; it was the language of modern business, of state administration, of secondary and higher education, of the judiciary, and of the army throughout the country. They probably also aspired toward a more general linguistic unification. From that point of view, "Walloon," which was not the language of a foreign state, was viewed as a mere dialect of French. It was further-

23 *Ibid.*, 38.

24 Analysis based on data in *Exposé* (1852), Title II, 6-11; Title III, 12-13, 16-21.

25 Kruihof, "De Samenstelling," 185-186, 212.

more politic to emphasize the similarity; hence “Walloons” were French speakers, if not yet, at least in the making. The problem was with “Flemish-Dutch.” Constrained by the necessity to maintain a united front among “Unionists” in the face of external threats, however, Belgian elites were both unwilling and unable to reinforce central authority over municipal affairs and over elementary education, which the forceful implementation of an assimilationist strategy required. Furthermore, the survival of a class-based liberal regime, ruling over a small and neutral international actor, required much less than in France the transformation of the country’s population into a power resource at the disposal of the state. Perhaps because the state was less imbued with a sense of historic mission, the countervailing principle of legitimacy founded on nationalism and popular sovereignty was also much weaker in Belgium than in France. Hence, as practiced in Belgium, assimilation was to be achieved in a more liberal manner. For the time being, it concerned only the strata immediately below the ruling bourgeoisie. The message to those among them who aspired to rise in Belgian society and to participate in politics was not only *Enrichissez-vous*, but *Francisez-vous*. The state’s obligation was to provide facilities for them to do what was perceived as being what they wished to do in any case, particularly by fostering French-language public middle and secondary schools. But the achievement of that goal was in turn constrained by forceful Catholic opposition. The Church was intent upon protecting the near-monopoly which it had established for the education, in French, of the children of the nobility and of the bourgeoisie in both regions.

The result was that, although they had no legal standing, Flemish and Walloon were tolerated not only as languages of private affairs but also as languages of municipal affairs where local authorities desired.²⁶ Since the municipal electorate was approximately four times larger than the national, it must have included many more Flemish speakers in the north; as municipal authority was considerably more extensive in Belgium than in much of Europe, the bulk of the population outside of the major cities of the Flemish region probably experienced a degree of self-government in their own language, as did their Walloon compatriots in the south. A parallel situation prevailed within the Church. Whereas its higher administration was conducted in Latin and French,

26 Henri Pirenne, *Histoire de Belgique* (Brussels, 1926), VII, 275. See also Clough, *History*, *passim*.

the local clergy, itself recruited from the people, conducted its activities, including primary education, in the languages of the people.²⁷

The policy choices made at the time of the founding not only imposed upon the two major linguistic segments differential costs of membership in Belgian society but formalized an important component of the culture of social stratification that was in the course of being established in the new political community. More clearly than ever before, and at a time when older status distinctions were being replaced by new ones, French—to which Walloon was being assimilated *de facto*—was the language of the center and of the higher strata, Flemish the language of the people. It was not a matter of “mere symbols” since institutional arrangements discriminated against members of the Flemish language group and concretely affected their life-chances in comparison with members of the other group. During the second half of the nineteenth century, although Belgium as a whole modernized at a more rapid pace than most of continental Europe, there emerged a sharp differentiation between “modern” and “backward” sectors of Belgian society. Since some aspects of this differentiation had a spatial character which coincided with the spatial distribution of the language segments, as Belgium modernized language differences themselves acquired an additional meaning.

Rather than a single “take-off,” Belgium experienced, as we have mentioned in passing, several spurts of economic development beginning in the second half of the eighteenth century.²⁸ It has been estimated that about 1840, with respect to overall level of economic development on a per capita basis, Belgium was on a par with the United States and Switzerland, a group second only to the United Kingdom.²⁹ This was due to the combination of a fairly high level of agricultural development, mostly labor-intensive, with a high level of capital-intensive industrial development. Of the active population, only 32 percent were engaged in agriculture in 1846. Belgium remained at this already low level for the next two decades, after which there was a sharp decline to 17 percent—a level higher only than that of the United Kingdom—in

27 Pirenne, *Histoire*, VII, 271.

28 Jan Craeybeckx, “Les débuts de la révolution industrielle en Belgique et les statistiques de la fin de l’Empire,” in *Mélanges Offerts à B. Jacquemyns* (Brussels, 1968), 115–144.

29 The following comparative account is based on P. Bairoch, “Niveaux de développement économique de 1810 à 1910,” *Annales*, XX (1965), 1091–1117.

1910.³⁰ Belgium's comparative standing with respect to horsepower per capita, which reflected the spread of steam-driven machinery and which is probably the most reliable indicator of industrial development, is given in Table 3 for the period 1840–1910.³¹

That industrialization was unevenly distributed spatially within Belgium is a feature which that country shares with others. It so happens, however, that in Belgium the distribution coincided to a large extent with the linguistic regions.

Table 4, which uses the same indicator as Table 3, summarizes the internal distribution of horsepower for the same period. The right-hand side of the table further compares the distribution of total population and of horsepower for the limiting dates. Throughout, Limburg (Flemish) and Luxemburg (Walloon) remained outside the mainstream; but they contained such a small proportion of the population of each group of the provinces that they did not affect the *per capita* distribution very much. The distribution is more sharply skewed

Table 3 Steam Engines in CV per 1,000 Population, Belgium and Selected Countries, 1840–1910 (Transport Excluded)

	1840	1860	1880	1900	1910
Belgium	8	21	49	97	150
France	1	5	14	46	73
Germany	6	5	37	80	110
Italy	— ^a	—	2	—	14
Russia	0.2	1	3	4	—
Spain	—	—	2	4	—
Sweden	—	—	—	31	55
Switzerland	—	—	—	25	37
United Kingdom	13	24	58	—	220
United States	—	25	45	120	150

SOURCE: P. Bairoch, "Niveaux de développement économique de 1810 à 1910," *Annales*, XX (1965), 1108, Table 7, selected years and countries.

a Indicates data not available.

30 H. Vander Eycken and P. Frantzen (eds.), *De tertiaire Sector* (Brussels, 1970), Table 1, 16–22.

31 There is little doubt, incidentally, that the country's early industrialization under the aegis of a relatively unrestrained entrepreneurial bourgeoisie accounts in part for the early emergence of a stable, liberal regime in the nineteenth century. See Zolberg, "Political Development in Belgium."

Table 4 Steam Engines in CV, Belgian Provinces, 1844–1910

	CV PER 1,000 POPULATION				CV AS PERCENT OF NATIONAL TOTAL ^a	
	1844	1866	1890	1910	1846	1910
Antwerp	1.1	5.5	32.5	79.6	1.1	6.8
West Flanders	0.6	4.8	18.0	72.2	0.9	5.6
East Flanders	2.9	16.0	42.5	111.7	6.1	11.1
Limburg	0.5	2.2	5.5	54.1	0.3	1.3
Brabant	2.2	9.3	31.6	103.5	4.1	13.5
Hainaut	30.2	86.6	153.8	301.8	57.8	32.9
Liège	22.0	71.7	115.2	312.8	26.6	24.6
Luxemburg	0	1.1	11.5	31.8	0	0.7
Namur	4.3	21.6	51.6	109.7	3.1	3.5
Kingdom	7.3	30.4	62.8	152.1	100	100

SOURCE: Verhaegen, *Contribution*, I, 196, 238, 278, 309.

a Percentages based on Verhaegen's data.

toward the Walloon region at the beginning than at the end; but, although the Flemish provinces started catching up somewhat between 1866 and 1890, the differential remained very large on the eve of World War I. These lasting regional differences reflected profound structural differences between two major sectors of Belgian manufacturing activity, textiles and metallurgy.

Although Belgian cotton manufactures had followed the British lead in the eighteenth century and emerged as a major pole of industrialization, the development of this sector was drastically curtailed after the loss of the Dutch Indies market in 1830; flax, a fiber which was the foundation of cottage-based linen manufactures which had become an important component of the Flemish region's economy in the eighteenth century, was not suited to the new industrial processes.³² On the other hand, metallurgy benefited from the proximate location of

³² For this and other aspects of the economic history of the Flemish region, as well as for a general interpretation of the facts, I am very much indebted to Verhaegen, *Contribution*.

iron and coal deposits, as well as of water, in the southern part of Belgium. Thus, it was probably for economic reasons, facilitated but not determined by the cultural orientation of the upper strata of Belgian society, that capital flowed toward the Walloon region rather than toward Flanders. In any case, as of 1846, the Flemish provinces had received only 9.2 percent of the country's recorded corporate investment.³³

The absence of capital-intensive industry did not mean that the Flemish region became exclusively agricultural. In 1846, whereas 49 percent of the gainfully employed population of Belgium was engaged in manufacture, for West and East Flanders combined the level was 55 percent. This level declined afterward to a low of 47 percent in 1890, after which it climbed to reach the national average of 52 percent in 1910.³⁴ What happened was that, in response to the surge of inexpensive, mass-produced English cotton, linen manufacture secured governmental tariff protection and survived by remaining labor-intensive and orienting itself to a luxury market for lace and other artisanal products. After a near fatal blow in the 1840s, linen manufacture recovered in the latter part of the century by following the same strategy. The absolute number of Belgians engaged in cottage manufacture actually rose between 1890 and 1910; most of the increase stemmed from West and East Flanders, and to a lesser extent from Antwerp and Brabant.³⁵ The Flemish region adapted itself, in addition, by relying more heavily on equally labor-intensive agriculture. Whereas the national percentage of those engaged in agriculture remained stable between 1846 and 1866, the percentage in East and West Flanders actually increased. Only in 1910 did the percentages in agriculture for those two provinces reach the low level achieved by Hainaut and Liège two-thirds of a century earlier.³⁶ Within the agricultural sector, moreover, there were significant differences between the two regions. Belgian agriculture as a whole was extremely fragmented, but more so in East and West Flanders than elsewhere; and in the Flemish region, a smaller proportion of agricultural enterprises were owner-operated.³⁷

In short, sharp regional disparities in economic development became firmly established during the second third of the nineteenth century. In particular, East and West Flanders, which contained about one-third of the total population of Belgium and approximately

33 *Ibid.*, I, 197–200.

34 *Ibid.*, I, 330; II, 21.

35 *Ibid.*, I, 311.

36 *Ibid.*, I, 330; II, 21, 59.

37 *Ibid.* See data in I, 124, 125, 126, 135.

two-thirds of its Flemish speakers, became bound to what had emerged, during the preceding century, as “the traditional Flemish way of life.” The bulk of their population combined household work in linen and other labor-intensive, localized manufacturing activities with subsistence farming on tiny parcels of land which most of them did not own; wages were low and rents were high.³⁸ As the system hinged on the ability of every member of the household to make a contribution to its income, a higher proportion of children and women were economically active in Flanders than elsewhere. The Flemish labor force retained this character until World War I.³⁹

From the point of view of the largely French-speaking urban bourgeoisie, which owned the land and the manufacturing firms in Flanders, the Flemish regional economy was doubly profitable. Although there are no adequate studies of their income, the provincial distribution of the highest taxpayers for the decade 1841–1850 shows that, in relation to the distribution of the total population, they were concentrated in Brabant; the Walloon provinces had less than their share, and the Flemish provinces had a share almost exactly proportional to their share of the total population.⁴⁰ From the point of view of the Belgian economy as a whole, conditions in the Flemish region contributed to the maintenance of low wages even in the new industry, to which Flemish migrants increasingly offered their services, a factor which probably contributed to its competitiveness in Europe, and, hence, to its rapid development. From the point of view of the Flemish masses, however, the system was a form of double exploitation, the consequences of which transcended the economic sphere. Their misery, already great during the first decade after independence, was cruelly exacerbated by the potato famine which ravaged Europe in the mid-1840s. Since the governmental response took the form of “relief” rather than of regional development, investment patterns remained unaltered and the major features of the economic structure which we have discussed persisted until late in the century. As Belgium moved

38 This is the central proposition of Verhaegen’s *Contribution*; see esp. I, 336ff. The similar situation described by Rowntree in his major survey suggests that these economic structures and their concomitant processes survived for a long time; see B. Seebohm Rowntree, *Land and Labour: Lessons from Belgium* (London, 1910).

39 Verhaegen, *Contribution*, I, 338; 89.

40 The analysis is based on the number of individuals in each province who were eligible for the Senate on the basis of payment of at least 1,000 florins (2,116.42 francs) in direct taxes for individual years 1841–1850. The data are given in *Exposé* (1852), Title III, 26.

toward the age of mass political participation, its Flemish region was becoming underdeveloped in relation to the country as a whole and in relation to its own past.

Although it is difficult to ascertain to what extent regional economic disparities were causally related to other aspects of Belgian society, there is little doubt that the economic underdevelopment of the Flemish region coincided with other features which, together, contributed to the transformation of Flemish culture into the "backward" sphere of Belgium. An educational gap between the two groups of provinces, which may have been due to the high incidence of child labor fostered by the household-based Flemish economy, was already

Table 5 Education in the Belgian Provinces at Mid-Century

PROVINCE	SCHOOL ATTENDANCE ^a		ILLITERATE CONSCRIPTS ^b
	%	Sex Ratio	
Antwerp	81.3	120	34.3
West Flanders	84.7	101	39.6
East Flanders	58.9	112	49.0
Limburg	72.5	123	35.5
Total	72.0	111	41.9
Brabant	81.0	121	38.3
Hainaut	81.5	100	45.7
Liège	79.4	112	34.0
Luxemburg	94.6	121	11.4
Namur	86.8	113	23.3
Total	83.6	109	34.8
Kingdom	78.0	111	38.8

SOURCES: a School population as a percent of children of both sexes aged 7 to 14 in 1848, computed from numerical data in *Exposé* (1852), Title IV, 124–125. Sex ratio (no. of boys per 100 girls) from same data.

b Percentages computed from numerical data for 1849 in *ibid.*, Title X, 129.

visible at mid-century. As Table 5 shows, whereas the proportion of children aged 7 to 14 who were being instructed in school or at home in 1848 was 78 percent for the country as a whole, the level by province ranged from a low of 59 in East Flanders to a high of 95 in Luxembourg; and the regional averages were 72 percent for the Flemish provinces, 81 for Brabant, and 84 for the Walloon provinces. Differences in the level of education of conscripts examined in 1849, which reflected the situation among the lower classes alone because exemptions could be purchased, were equally striking. Although for Belgium as a whole, 39 percent of these young men born around the year of independence were illiterate, the level ranged from 49 percent in East Flanders to only 11 percent in Luxembourg. A glimpse at primary education statistics for 1910 shows that as Belgium became a generally more literate country, regional disparities did not disappear.⁴¹ Where it was provided, instruction was in French for the Walloons and in Flemish for the Flemings. The progress of instruction therefore resulted in the assimilation of Walloons into the culture of the Belgian center, and the alienation of Flemings. At higher levels, it stands to reason that so long as post-elementary education was mostly dispensed in French, those educated in Flemish at lower levels remained at a clear disadvantage; and the data indicate that regional disparities were even greater at that level, which constituted the gateway to entry into the occupational middle classes.⁴² Even by common European standards of the time, popular education in Flemish was a genuine deadend.

It is much more difficult to ascertain to what extent Flemings and Walloons differed—before, during, and after the industrialization of Belgium—with respect to other spheres of life which are often related to the “traditional-modern” dichotomy, such as religious outlook, family structure, basic socialization more generally, and such allegedly dependent variables as “need achievement” or “empathy.” Basic research on these subjects, with the exception of the demographic aspects noted below, has either not been undertaken or simply not come to light at this time.⁴³

Although almost all Belgians were nominally Catholic at the beginning of the nineteenth century and have remained so down to the

41 Ministry of Interior, *Statistique de la Belgique. Populations. Recensement général du 31 décembre 1910* (Brussels, 1912), II, 470–471.

42 Based on data in *Exposé* (1852), Title I, 6–11.

43 This statement is based on a careful examination of a recently published survey of historical research; see J. A. Van Houtte, *Un quart de siècle de Recherche Historique en Belgique, 1944–1968* (Louvain, 1970).

present, they differed not only with respect to the frequency of their practice but also with respect to their fundamental religious orientation, probably in a manner paralleling differences found in France.⁴⁴ These differences were clearly manifested at the level of the political class and provided one of the foundations for the institutionalization of the Liberal and Catholic political camps. It is widely believed, moreover, that Flemings as a whole retained a higher frequency of Catholic practice than Walloons and that their Catholicism was more austere and puritanical, more “fundamentalist,” in keeping with the fact that Jansenism originated in Flanders. These religious differences, to which are added even more general variations in outlook and disposition, constitute a cultural complex which is often used in the literature on Belgium—and by Belgians in everyday life—to account for the regional differences already noted, for distinct demographic behaviors, as well as for the variations in partisan affiliation that developed as Belgium approached universal suffrage. In fact, however, religious and other cultural differences are *inferred* from these other, more easily observable behavioral and social structural variations, rather than verified independently of them. Evidence from Belgian government sources on the subject of religious behavior in the nineteenth century is extremely limited and inconclusive.⁴⁵ Evidence from the present shows great variation in religiosity, as measured by Sunday mass attendance, in both linguistic regions, but with a lower minimum level in the Walloon region; however, we do not know how early these patterns were established, and whether or not they were

44 See, for example, Theodore Zeldin, *Conflict in French Society* (London, 1970), 13–50.

45 The *Exposé* (1852) records 99.8 percent “Catholics” (10–11). It also contains information concerning the distribution of religious personnel (secular and regular, for Catholics) by province. An examination of the data for *secular* priests suggests that they reflect the administrative structure of the Church, which itself paralleled civil administration, rather than variations in local demand for religious services. The distribution of *regular* personnel (priests, lay brothers and sisters) shows a skewing toward the Flemish region, especially for contemplative orders. But this cannot be taken as an indication of relatively greater “productivity” of religious personnel—and hence of greater religiosity of the population—in that region since we do not know whether members of communities located there in fact originated in the region itself. Finally, the *Exposé* also provides information concerning seminary students in the several dioceses. Although the proportion of seminarians in the Walloon region was greater than the region’s proportion of the total population would lead us to expect (*ibid.*, Title III, 215), this indicator is not very reliable because the diocese of Liège covered Flemish-speaking Limburg as well as the German-speaking part of Luxemburg.

independent of social and economic change.⁴⁶ Since I have so far found no reliable research on the subject of religion and “way of life” more generally, these factors will not be considered further either as cause or as effect.

For the time being, the most promising area of investigation is in the field of historical demography. Regional demographic differences, indicating variations in family structure and perhaps in the general orientation of individuals toward nature and society, did emerge in the course of the nineteenth century.⁴⁷ At equal levels of modernization, for example, the Walloon population adopted birth control practices to a greater extent and earlier than the Flemish; and it is probable that this and other changes in demographic practices spread in the Walloon region, as in France where they originated, somewhat independently of industrialization, whereas in the Flemish region, they occurred only as the result of industrialization. The evidence also suggests that in the Flemish region, the survival of late marriage and frequent celibacy was specifically related to the household economy discussed earlier; some believe, in addition, that this nexus was related to the survival of patrimonial authority and thereby to the political character of the region, i.e., its deferential and Catholic tone.

Although this line of inquiry is strewn with serious conceptual and empirical obstacles, we may tentatively conclude that two factors, relatively independent of each other, contributed to a generalized differentiation of the two Belgian regions in the course of the nineteenth century. Relatively underdeveloped from the point of view of industrialization and urbanization, France nevertheless adopted before most of Western Europe demographic practices which have come to be viewed as modern. These practices, which may have been related to a more generalized change of fundamental outlook, flowed into Belgium along a specific geographical and cultural path. At about the same time, and for reasons mostly independent of previous cultural or social structural differences among the general population of the two regions, Belgian capital was invested in metallurgy rather than in textiles. Industrialization occurred first in Hainaut and Liège, where raw materials were located, rather than in the region north of the language

46 Liliane Voye, *Sociologie du Geste Religieux* (Brussels, 1973).

47 The discussion that follows is mostly based on the work of R. Lesthaegue, “Vruchtbaarheidscontrole, nuptialiteit en sociaal-economische veranderingen in België, 1846–1910,” *Bevolking en Gezin*, II (1972) 251–305; Etienne van de Walle, “Marriage and Marital Fertility,” *Daedalus*, XCVII (1969), 468–501, and personal communication with the two authors (Feb. 1973).

line. Whatever may have been the case in the eighteenth century, Flemings and Walloons did become more distinct in other than linguistic ways in the middle decades of the nineteenth, when a Belgian society was formed. Furthermore, the distinction that appeared was not a mere difference: It was a difference whose meaning was related to modernization and which significantly shaped its future path. Although some of the disparities subsequently waned, the “definition of the situation” established when disparities were at their peak outlasted its social and economic underpinnings.

Whether or not a universal phenomenon, it certainly was generally the case in Western societies that the more fortunate and privileged tended to rationalize the visible disparities in the human condition that emerged in the course of modernization by attributing them to the innate characteristics of different groups. For the religious-minded, the disparities were providential; for the secular-minded, they were natural; in either case, they were just. Marxian class analysis was, among other things, an attempt to provide an ideological alternative to widespread beliefs which attributed the misery of the poor to their atavistic racial disposition. It is not surprising that modernization was coupled with the rise of social Darwinism and that, as it occurred, a variety of “primordial” attributes were integrated into the stratification culture of Western societies.⁴⁸ The specifics varied according to local circumstances and available categories. In Belgium, where denominational or racial criteria were not available, and “ethnicity” was inherently ambiguous, language, strictly speaking, became a summary measure of social distance and of relatively modern or backward disposition among the lower classes. These distinctions functioned as a self-fulfilling prophecy. As they became more modern with respect to occupation, demographic behavior, and perhaps religious outlook, the Walloons also became more literate in French; and as they became more literate, they shared the linguistic culture of the center, a process which confirmed their progressive disposition and relative suitability for social promotion. The resulting institutional arrangements indeed facilitated their mobility. Modernizing Flemings followed the same path in spite of the additional cost of learning another language, as we shall see below, and became ordinary Belgians. In the eyes of “modern” Belgians, the rest, by contrast, vegetated in what had

48 The cultural aspects of stratification are discussed in Lloyd Fallers, “Equality, Modernity, and Democracy in the New States,” in Geertz, *Old Societies*, 162ff.

become “tradition.” They clung to a language whose unsuitability for life in modern times was demonstrated by its increasing tendency to borrow from French or by an opposite tendency to “purify” the language of French infection; their culture became ever more contemptible. Those who remained identifiably Flemish became, by the very process of things, a residual population which was, in fact, observably more backward than the francophonic group. That to a Frenchman’s ear hardly any Belgians spoke anything but an abominable *patois* exacerbated the insecurity of the Belgians whom they mocked, and probably contributed further to the affirmation of French language and culture as exclusivist criteria of higher status and of modernity in Belgium.

These generalized orientations probably mattered more as the occupational structure of Belgium continued to modernize itself, particularly as more white-collar and bureaucratic managerial roles were created. For Belgium as a whole, it is estimated that the tertiary sector contained 12.8 percent of the active population in 1846. The proportion had doubled by 1880 and reached 30 percent in 1900, about the same level as in the United States and in Great Britain.⁴⁹ Although more detailed breakdowns of the tertiary sector are not readily available, the proportion of the active population engaged in “liberal and administrative” professions grew at about the same rate, from 2.5 percent in 1846 to 5.8 percent in 1910.⁵⁰ That the proportions found in East and West Flanders were below the national average is not the point at issue here. It is rather that, as the white-collar component of the tertiary sector grew, there were more occupations in Belgium for which cultural attributes such as formal education and linguistic skills mattered. As entrance into these occupations, which constituted the “new middle class” in all industrialized societies, became the normal path of social mobility, formal qualifications imposed by French-oriented private and public employers, as well as generalized prejudice against Flemish, imposed relatively greater costs than in the past upon a relatively greater number of members of the Flemish language group.

The political expression of language relationships in Belgium during the second half of the nineteenth century can be analyzed in terms of an ever more forceful attempt by the middle strata of the Flemish

49 Vander Eycken et al., *De Tertiaire Sector*, 16, 22, 23.

50 Verhaegen, *Contribution*, I, 347.

region to reduce the inequitable distribution of the costs of membership in the Belgian political community by instituting bilingualism of services and symbols, first at the level of their own region and then at the center. That these efforts were to a large extent successful is due to the fact that they were channeled into the emergent party system; and this process, in turn, explains why the subsequent transformation of “a problem of languages” into “a problem of communities” did not destroy the Belgian regime. Since the detailed history of movements, issues, and relevant legislation is well covered in the literature, this presentation emphasizes its analytic aspects.⁵¹

Protest against the institutionalization of a unilingual, francophonic Belgian center was initially the limited affair of a small number of middle-level intellectuals whose orientation reflected the general division of the Belgian political class into Catholic and Liberal camps. The Catholics tended to emphasize the idiosyncratic aspects of traditional Flemish culture in opposition to Dutch Protestant culture on the one hand and to French secular culture on the other; they were inward-looking localists. Initially “Orangist,” the secular-minded *Flamingants* turned toward Belgium after 1839 but retained Dutch culture as a model for the modernization of their own. It was under their impulse, for example, that Flemish spelling was standardized in 1844 to bring it closer to modern Dutch and that, later on, *vlaamsch* (Flemish) came to be called *nederlandsch* (Dutch) in Belgium.

The waning of Orangism reinforced the *Flamingant* voice and in 1840 associations from both streams cooperated in the circulation of a petition which allegedly obtained over one hundred thousand signatures. Although it did not achieve its legislative goals, the petition created a *Flamingant* audience and provided it with the kernel of a coherent ideology. To the official view of a unitary, unilingually francophonic Belgium where Flemish was “tolerated,” it opposed a vision of Belgium as a nation containing two regions, one of which was characterized by the fact that the overwhelming majority of its population spoke Flemish, and advocated the institutionalization of

51 The work by Clough, (note 2) is better than any available in French. The following account is based mostly on secondary sources in Dutch, esp. the relevant chapters in J. A. Van Houtte et al. (eds.), *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* (Utrecht, 1949–1958; 12 v.) X, XI; the four-volume work of Elias, cited earlier; and Theo Luykx’ *Politieke Geschiedenis van België van 1789 tot Heden* (Brussels, 1964), which is good on legislative details. For a review of the literature, see A. Willemsen, “De geschiedenis van de Vlaamse Beweging tot 1914. En overzicht van recente literatuur,” in *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, LXXXI (1968), 306–333.

this vision in a legislative program. This entailed establishing by law the bilingual character of the north and reorganizing services accordingly and, less distinctly, moving away from the francophonic character of the national center. This view did not challenge the notion that Flemish speakers must become bilingual in order to enter public life;⁵² but policies founded on it would have as their effect a less one-sided distribution of the costs to Flemish speakers of membership in the Belgian state by shifting part of the burdens of bilingualism on the hitherto exclusively French-speaking officials.

This outlook was common to nearly all of the Flemish-minded protest groups which arose in Belgium throughout the nineteenth century and which otherwise differed with respect to their Liberal or Catholic orientation, their advocacy of slow or rapid change, and their strategy vis-à-vis established political parties. Specific events, such as the famine of the 1840s and its aftermath; the revelation by way of the census of 1846 that a majority of Belgians spoke Flemish; the electoral reforms of 1848 which brought many more Flemish speakers into the political arena, particularly at the municipal level; the offensively francophonic character of national jubilee celebrations in 1856; and the suppression of a Commission report sympathetic to Flemish demands in 1857, contributed to a broadening of support for what historians call “the Flemish movement,” a designation which exaggerates its unified character, and to the more urgent tone adopted by some spokesmen.

As party government was being institutionalized at about this time, Flemish-minded organizations sought to secure from Liberals and Catholics the nomination of municipal and parliamentary candidates sympathetic to their demands. Relatively successful in Antwerp (where, after they organized a pivotal independent party in the early 1860s, the *Flamingants* obtained a better audience in the Catholic camp), this strategy was generalized as expansion of the electorate and the rise of new social and political issues maximized the bargaining power of factions inside of the established parties. Although Flemish constituencies tended to vote more heavily for the Catholic camp, the regions were far from polarized with respect to partisan orientation.⁵³ For example, in the last general legislative election held under conditions of limited suffrage (1892), the Catholics obtained 54 percent of

52 Elias, *Geschiedenis*, I, 386.

53 Analysis based on the electoral data presented by W. Moyne in *Résultats des élections belges entre 1847 et 1914* (Brussels, 1970).

the national vote; the percentage level ranged from 55 to 81 for the Flemish provinces and from 39 to 73 for the Walloon; the party obtained 61 percent of the votes in Louvain (the Flemish district of Brabant), 52 in Nivelles (the Walloon one), and 48 in the Brussels district. In the first election held under conditions of universal male suffrage (mandatory and plural voting, 1894), the regional disparities were somewhat sharper. The Catholics obtained 51 percent of the national vote, but their level ranged from 63 to 79 percent in the Flemish provinces as against 27 to 56 percent in the Walloon; they obtained 45 percent of the votes in Nivelles, 63 in Louvain, and 47 in Brussels.

It is not surprising that it was toward the Catholic party that *Flamingant* pressures were especially directed, and that it was within this camp that conflict in the form of tension between a Flemish-minded, populist, Christian-Democratic movement, and the established, French-cultured, conservative leadership, was particularly great. After a period in the desert, however, Christian Democracy was integrated into the Catholic Party; with it came a reinforcement of the party's Flemish orientation, at the very time it was dominant at the national level.⁵⁴ But the Liberal Party also derived a substantial portion of its clientele from the Flemish region, and secular-minded *Flamingants* continued to play an important role in the movement until World War I. Although the Socialist Party, founded in 1885, initially derived most of its electoral support from the heavily industrialized parts of the Walloon region, it could not hope to grow on the sole basis of Walloon support. Hence, sooner or later, all three Belgian parties became at least somewhat responsive to Flemish aspirations. By way of the parties, therefore, the parliamentary system acquired some capacity not only for processing linguistic and cultural issues initiated by activists outside its purview, but also for defining them, shaping their course, and for containing them within bounds. In the long run, this insured that as language-related issues became more prominent in Belgian politics, they would not necessarily threaten the system.

After a period of initial resistance, parliamentary pressures, combined with the occasional demonstrations of "street power" that were an established form of political action in Belgium, effected a

54 For the beginnings of Flemish-minded Christian Democracy, and conflicts within the Catholic political world, see K. Van Isacker, *Het Daensisme* (Antwerp, 1959); Luykx, *Politieke Geschiedenis*, 225n, 228; J. Willekens in Van Houtte et al., *Algemene Geschiedenis*, XI, 164–178.

major breakthrough.⁵⁵ The first wave of linguistic legislation, founded on a recognition of the “bilingual” character of northern Belgium—i.e., institution of Flemish-language services and protection of the rights of the francophonic minority to obtain public services in French—was passed with little opposition in the 1870s.⁵⁶ In this sphere, the question was henceforth merely a matter of how much would be done and how soon. It was only when the *Flamingants*, in the wake of their success, began to strive toward a bilingualization of the Belgian center itself that their activities evoked organized resistance, not only on the part of representatives of the Walloon region and of Brussels, but also on the part of francophonic residents of the Flemish region, whom the *Flamingants* called, in turn, *franskiljon* (i.e., “Frenchie”). This struggle centered on a modification of legislation concerning official languages and on the introduction of Flemish into the secondary school system of the northern region so as to permit the entrance of Flemish speakers into the middle and higher ranks of state services as well as more generally into public life.⁵⁷ In this respect, the breakthrough occurred in 1883 when, after several years of effort, the Liberal and Catholic representatives agreed upon a law making Dutch a mandatory subject in the *public* secondary schools of the Flemish region. It is noteworthy, in the light of the widespread assertion of an identity of “Flemish” with “Catholic” interests, that the church hierarchy sharply resisted similar programmatic reforms in *their* schools, which constituted a majority of secondary institutions in the region. Flemish was further rehabilitated in 1887, when the King of Belgium made his first public speech in Flemish. In the last two decades of the century, bilingual requirements were established for most higher-level civil servants. Already in the 1860s, the first member of parliament ever to take his oath of office in Flemish had advocated in vain a modification of Article 23 of the Constitution to grant Flemish full status as one of the official languages of Belgium. Although in the 1890s a further attempt was made to include this modification in the constitutional revision package dealing with universal suffrage, Article 23 remained as it was. It was only in 1898, nearly seventy years after independence and the grant of linguistic freedom, that Belgium, under the pressure of a growing

55 “Street power” is my adaptation of the *Politique de grande voirie* identified by Frans Van Kalken in *Commutations Populaires en Belgique (1834–1902)* (Brussels, 1936).

56 See the parliamentary divisions in Luykx, *Politieke Geschiedenis*, 174–175.

57 Clough, *History*, 149; Elias, *Geschiedenis*, III, 53, 332; Willekens in Van Houtte et al., *Algemene Geschiedenis*, XI, 368.

Flamingant movement capable of organizing mass demonstrations on behalf of bilingualism, became officially *Belgique-België*.⁵⁸

By then, however, it had become clear that the formal grant of linguistic parity by no means resolved problems of linguistic equity in Belgium. Bilingualism was not effectively required throughout the central bureaucracy, except for Flemish speakers who wished to enter what was still a mostly francophonic world; in the upper levels of the private sector, French prevailed and remained unchallenged. The *Flamingants* recognized that the burdens of bilingualism weighed differently on Flemish speakers, who had to acquire a second language, than on French speakers, who seldom had to acquire more than a rudimentary knowledge of Flemish or who could ignore that language altogether at little cost. Furthermore, they saw evidence everywhere that, even while *vervlaamsching* ("Flemishization") of public services and of education was becoming a reality, *verfransching* ("Frenchization") of the most dynamic elements of the Flemish population was occurring at an accelerating rate through the interplay of upward mobility with assimilationist forces radiating from Brussels. These perceptions can be checked against the evidence that became available upon publication of the census of 1910 which, for the first time, asked individuals *both* which languages they knew and which they used most frequently.⁵⁹

58 Clough, *History*, 116ff.; L. Wils in Van Houtte et al., *Algemene Geschiedenis*, XI, 164–78; Elias, *Geschiedenis*, IV, 1ff.

59 Like its predecessors, the census of 1910 transformed a continuum of language attributes into discrete categories. Its originality is that it combined the question asked in 1846 ("What language do you use most often?") with the question asked in 1866, 1880, 1890, and 1900, "What languages can you speak?" The possible categories were: French (which obviously included Walloon); Flemish; German; or "none of the national languages" (children under two and foreigners who spoke other languages). Following the approach set forth by Levy, "La Statistique," we therefore obtain a population of "speakers" (a term used in the discussion that follows) who fall into the following sets: French only, Flemish only, German only; multilinguals who speak French and Flemish, French and German, Flemish and German, or all three; multilinguals who speak French most often, Flemish most often, and German most often. Since foreigners who spoke one of the three Belgian languages were enumerated along with the others, it is impossible to eliminate them (e.g., 119,148 individuals born in France, some of whom were Belgian nationals; 80,765 French nationals, some of whom were born in Belgium; similarly 64,660 Netherlands nationals; and approximately an equal number of individuals, nationals of or born in German-speaking parts of Europe such as Baden, Bavaria, Alsace, Switzerland, Prussia, etc.). The error due to the presence of these foreigners is of the order of plus or minus 0.5 percent for the major language groups. Where appropriate, concentrations of foreigners will be noted.

Most of the percentage indicators used in the discussion are self-explanatory and based on the data as presented in the census. The one exception is the attempt to combine

The languages were now called “French,” “Flemish,” and “German.” The census of 1910 can be understood in turn against the background of more limited data for earlier years.

Table 6 summarizes the linguistic situation for Belgium as a whole

Table 6 Language Changes in Belgium, 1846–1910

CENSUS YEAR	LANGUAGES KNOWN ($\geq 100\%$)				LANGUAGES USED (= 100%)		
	FRENCH & WAL- LOON	FLEMISH & DUTCH	GER- MAN	MULTI- LINGUALS (OF PRE- CEDING)	FRENCH OR WAL- LOON	FLEMISH OR DUTCH	GER- MAN
1846 ^a	—	—	—	—	42.2	57.0	0.8
1866 ^b	49.3	56.5	1.2	6.9	—	—	—
1880 ^c	51.7	55.9	1.7	9.2	—	—	—
1890 ^d	54.1	57.5	2.2	13.3	—	—	—
1900 ^e	55.0	58.0	2.3	14.5	—	—	—
1910 ^f	53.5	58.6	2.4	14.2	44.9	54.0	1.1

SOURCES: a *Exposé* (1852), Title II, 6–11. Based on total population; young children attributed to language group of parents.

b Levy, “La Statistique,” 566. Children included as in *a*.

c Computed from numerical data in Belgium, Ministry of Interior, *Annuaire Statistique de la Belgique, 1912* (Brussels, 1913), 87. The data therein are a corrected version of the 1880 census. Children aged 2 or less are excluded (also deaf-mutes).

d *Ibid.* Children included as in *a* and *b*; deaf-mutes included.

e *Ibid.* Children excluded as in *c*; deaf-mutes included.

f Belgium, Ministry of Interior, *Statistique de la Belgique. Population. Recensement Général du 31 décembre 1910* (Brussels, 1913), III, 164–197. Children under 2 excluded, deaf-mutes not specified.

unilingual and multilingual sets in order to obtain a percentage indicator of the proportion of each “language group” (those who speak a given language only or most often) who are multilingual. The census data also permit a certain amount of cross-sectional analysis of linguistic with other attributes. The data are aggregated in the following manner: by sex, from which we can obtain sex ratios; by age (total speaker population; population 15 and over; population 21 and over), from which we can obtain the following groups: 2–14, 15–20, and 21 and over; by size of commune (five sizes, ranging from under 2,000 to 100,000 and over). Geographically, the data are aggregated at the level of individual communes, *arrondissements*, provinces, and nation. The sociological and geographical aggregations do not overlap completely; for example, age groups are available only from the *arrondissement* level up.

from 1846 to 1910, a period during which the total population increased by 74 percent. In macroscopic terms, Belgium in 1910 resembled Belgium in 1846: It remained a country divided into two large language groups. As the right-hand side of the table shows, a majority of the population used Flemish only or used it most frequently; but the majority had diminished slightly to the benefit of French. Whereas there were 135 “Flemish or Dutch” users in 1846 for 100 “French or Walloon” users, there were only 120 “Flemish” to 100 “French” in 1910. The left-hand side of the table shows changes in the percentages of the population who knew each of the three national languages. All three went up between 1866 (the first year for which this information is available) and 1910: The rate is highest for German, followed by French and then by Flemish. Whereas in 1866, 114 Belgians knew Flemish for every 100 who knew French, 108 did so in 1880, 106 in 1890 and 1900, and 109 in 1910. The middle column shows a rapid increase in the percentage of multilinguals during the quarter of a century between 1866 and 1890, after which there is a leveling off. The relative decline of Flemish cannot be attributed to a higher rate of natural reproduction of the French language group in comparison with the Flemish. Indeed, although there were many fluctuations in the several components that go into the making of this rate (births, marriages, and deaths), on balance, during most of the relevant period, the opposite was the case.⁶⁰ The net French gain therefore probably

60 Verhaegen, with reference to East and West Flanders, states that if their relative population in relation to that of the Kingdom had depended uniquely on variations in the national balance, “it is certain that their demographic importance, already considerable in 1846, would have grown during the XIXth century” (*Contribution*, I, 73). He then goes on to show that their relative demographic decline was due to emigration to other provinces, a phenomenon analyzed in greater detail by Allan H. Kittell, “The Revolutionary Period of the Industrial Revolution: Industrial Innovation and Population Displacement in Belgium 1830–1880,” *Journal of Social History*, I (1967), 119–148. But, from our point of view, it is important to note that these emigrants carried their family patterns with them, as the demographic structure of Antwerp and the Flemish-speaking population of Brabant suggests, and hence that the language group as a whole continued to contribute more than the Walloons to the growth of the Belgian population. This omits emigration to foreign countries altogether. Belgian emigration at no time approached the rate achieved by the Irish, whose situation the Flemish approximated at mid-century. *The Historical Statistics of the United States* (Washington, D.C., 1961) classifies Belgians with Dutch, French, and Luxemburgish immigrants as “other Northwestern Europe.” The total numbers for the period 1850–1910 averaged about 15,000 per year (*ibid.*, 56–57). Under the impact of the potato famine, Irish immigration doubled from 51,752 in 1846 to 105,536 in 1847; the figures for “other Northwestern Europe” also doubled, but from 12,303 to 24,336. Irish immigration reached a maximum of 221,253 in 1851; the maximum for the others was 27,796 in 1881 (*ibid.*). The overall

represents a balance sheet of several factors, whose character we can approximate from a more detailed analysis of the 1910 census.

For this purpose, the analysis of multilinguals is important since it is by way of those categories that transfers from one language group to the other necessarily took place. Table 7 gives the details of language knowledge for 1910 and the four preceding censuses. The growth of multilinguals is accounted for mostly by a vast increase of bilinguals who know French and Flemish. Those who know at least these two languages ("French and Flemish," plus "All Three") constituted about 90 percent of multilinguals in each census. But what were the contributions of each language group to the growth of multilinguals?

Table 7 Unilinguals and Multilinguals, 1866-1910 (%)

	1866	1880	1890	1900	1910
<i>Unilinguals</i>					
French	42.4	42.6	41.0	40.6	40.0
Flemish	50.0	47.5	45.3	44.5	45.4
German	0.7	0.7	0.5	0.5	0.4
Total	93.1	90.8	86.8	85.6	85.8
<i>Multilinguals</i>					
French & Flemish	6.4	8.1	11.6	12.4	12.3
French & German	0.4	0.7	0.6	1.2	1.1
Flemish & German	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
All Three	0.1	0.3	0.6	0.7	0.7
Total	6.9	9.1	12.9	14.4	14.2
Use French mostly	—	—	—	—	4.9
Use Flemish mostly	—	—	—	—	8.6
Use German mostly	—	—	—	—	0.7

SOURCES: Same as Table 6. Figures for 1866 were kindly supplied by Paul Levy.

number of Belgian nationals in France went up from 128,103 to 465,060, a net increase of about 10,000 a year for the period (République Française, Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques, *Annuaire Statistique de la France 1966. Résumé Rétrospectif* [Paris, 1966], 61).

Since the percentage of French users grew slightly, and the percentage of French and Flemish monolinguals declined at approximately the same rate, there is a hypothetical possibility that the French contributed more than the Flemish to the growth of multilinguals.

But this conclusion is negated by evidence from the 1910 census itself which, for the first time, established which one of the languages that they knew the multilinguals, in fact, used most often. By combining this information with the other categories, we can also ascertain how many of the users of each language are multilingual. In 1910, 61 percent of multilinguals mostly used Flemish. Among the language groups established on the basis of usage (right-hand side of Table 6), 11 percent of the French, 16 percent of the Flemish, and 59 percent of the Germans knew at least one of the other two national languages. In other words, for 100 French-using multilinguals, there are 145 Flemish. Table 8 shows, among other things, that these ratios, as well as the linguistic situation generally, hold when the two sexes are considered separately.

In the absence of comparisons over time for the period preceding 1910, we can only guess that this pattern of higher multilinguality among Flemish users was established some time earlier and that it accounts for much of the rapid growth of multilingualism between 1866 and 1890. And if that was the case, then there is also a possibility that it accounts for the relatively greater growth of French users between 1846 and 1910, in spite of the higher rate of natural reproduction of the Flemish language group. Some of the Flemish users who became bilingual undoubtedly shifted later on from the “Flemish mostly” to the “French mostly” category. In 1910, therefore, although 54 percent of the population was classified in the Flemish language group on the basis of exclusive or frequent usage, part of the 5 percent who were multilinguals declaring that they used mostly French—and perhaps even some of the “French only”—represented a transfer from members of one language group to the other in the course of one or more generations. A process of linguistic assimilation, consistent with what we would expect on the basis of historical parallels and of social scientific theories, was at work in Belgium.

At first glance, the cross-sectional analysis of linguistic attributes and age which the census data make possible gives additional support for this hypothesis (see Table 8). The proportion of those who fall into the French-using group rises from 39 percent among males between ages 2 and 14, to 48 percent for adults aged 21 and over; a similar shift

Table 8 Languages in 1910, by Sex and Age (In %)

	MEN		WOMEN		BOTH SEXES			
	15-20	≥21	15-20	≥21	15-20	≥21		
Total Population	3,680,790		3,742,994		7,423,784			
Non-Speakers ^a	1,677,399		1,634,484		3,311,883			
Speakers	3,513,391		3,579,500		7,092,891			
	AGE CATEGORIES							
	2-14	15-20	≥21	Total	2-14	15-20	≥21	Total
Speakers								
French only	36.0	37.7	41.7	39.7	36.1	38.2	42.4	40.2
French mostly	2.6	4.9	6.1	5.0	2.6	5.0	6.0	4.9
French Group	38.6	42.5	47.8	44.6	38.7	43.2	48.3	45.1
Flemish only	56.4	45.9	40.4	45.5	56.0	44.5	40.8	54.3
Flemish mostly	4.0	10.4	10.6	8.8	4.4	11.3	9.8	8.5
Flemish Group	60.4	56.3	51.1	54.3	60.4	55.8	50.6	53.8
German Group	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.1
Total, 3 Groups	100.0	99.9	100.0	100.0	100.1	100.1	100.1	100.0
Multilinguals								
% of all speakers	7.0	16.0	17.5	14.4	7.4	16.9	17.0	14.0
% of French Group	6.7	11.4	12.7	11.1	6.8	11.5	12.3	10.9
% of Flemish Group	6.6	18.4	20.8	16.2	7.3	20.2	19.3	15.8
Age Structure of Language Groups								
French	24.0	11.1	64.9	100.0	23.2	10.9	65.9	100.0
Flemish	30.9	12.1	57.1	100.1	30.4	11.8	57.9	100.1
German	24.4	12.1	63.5	100.0	24.3	11.4	63.3	100.0

SOURCE: Computed from numerical data in 1910 census. (Percentages do not always add up to 100 due to rounding.)
 a Individuals who did not speak at least one of the three national languages (mostly infants, but also some foreigners).

is observable for females. The age structure of the language users is itself given in the table. Is it possible that the Belgians, who were divided in a ratio of approximately 60–40 when they were young, transferred from the Flemish language group to the French sufficiently to account for a nearly 50–50 ratio among adults? Unfortunately, this conclusion is unwarranted because of the known demographic differential referred to earlier. In 1910, the two *regions* of Belgium had in fact different age pyramids: In the four Walloon provinces and the Walloon part of Brabant, 25 percent of the population fell in the age 2–14 category and 64 percent were 21 or older; in the Flemish region, the percentages were 31 and 57 percent, respectively. Furthermore, persons who spoke none of the three national languages constituted 5.1 percent of the population in the Flemish region, and only 3.8 percent of the Walloon. That the Flemish population was on the whole younger is, of course, consistent with observations concerning the Flemish birthrate in the latter part of the nineteenth century. One possible hint concerning assimilation is that, whereas in the younger age group the percentage distribution of language users was parallel for the two sexes, among adults a slightly greater proportion of women than of men used French. This finding is consistent with the possibility that French-using men were more likely to marry Flemish-using women than vice versa and that, when this occurred, the women transferred into their husband's more prestigious language group, a path toward francophonic assimilation which warrants further research. On the whole, although the higher frequency of French users among older Belgians found in the table cannot be taken as substantial evidence concerning francophonic assimilation, it does not contradict more general inferences drawn from Tables 6 and 7 on this subject.

Table 8 does demonstrate, however, that multilingualism increased with age. For both sexes, for 100 multilinguals in the youngest age group there are more than 200 in the 15–20 age group; and the proportion of male multilinguals is even higher among those aged 21 and over. This enables us to view 1910 as one point in a process of historical change. Given the fact that Belgians who were young in 1910 were getting more education (including some formal instruction in a second language) than those who had grown up earlier, and given that few of the older in 1910 had been educated beyond the elementary level, much of the differential between the age groups can be attributed to the functional acquisition of another language, mainly through occupational interactions. And if that is the case, then the fact that the

15–20 age group in 1910 had already reached a level of 16 to 17 percent leads us to anticipate a continued growth in their level of multilingualism as they get older.

A comparison of the two major language groups reveals a dynamic aspect of the difference already noted between them. Starting from about the same level of multilingualism in the younger age group, the older Flemish achieve a much higher one than the French. Among adult males, for every 100 French-using multilinguals, there are 164 Flemish; among women, 157. Thus, behavioral differences between the two populations were even greater than the gross percentages indicated. That one-fifth of Flemish-using adults in 1910 were multilinguals—almost exclusively with French as their other language—suggests that multilingual households were not uncommon; and this in turn suggests the intergenerational transmission of multilingualism. Not only would this make for cumulative effects, but it points to a mechanism for intergenerational transfers for the Flemish-using group to the French as multilingual Flemish-using children, capable of attending French-language elementary schools, could easily enter permanently into the French user category.

We have already noted that in spite of the localization of industry in the Walloon region, it was *not* the case that Flemish users were more rural and French users more urban in 1846; Table 9 shows that this fact was also true in 1910. The incidence of multilingualism varied positively with urban residence in 1910, but there were striking differences between the two major language groups in this respect. In the largest cities, 31 percent of the French users were multilingual and only 29 percent of the Flemish (96 Flemish per 100 French); the ratio then increases in favor of the Flemish in the less urban areas, until there are 327 Flemish-using multilinguals for 100 French in the smallest villages. To put it differently, although about the same proportion of each language group lived in towns of 20,000 or more, these towns contained 69 percent of all French-using multilinguals but only 55 percent of the Flemish. Knowledge of French among Flemish users was not only greater, as we have already noted, but it was also *more dispersed* than knowledge of Flemish among French users. Whatever factors produced multilingualism affected the two language groups about evenly in the largest towns; but their impact upon the French users diminished much more rapidly in the less urban areas until in the most rural fifth of Belgium, their impact upon Flemish users was three times greater than upon the French.

Table 9 Languages in 1910, by Size of Commune (In %)

	100,000 and over	20,000 to 99,999	5,000 to 19,999	2,000 to 4,999	Under 2,000
<i>Total Population</i> (→100%)	11.0	18.6	26.9	21.3	22.3
<i>Speakers</i>					
French only	24.9	35.6	39.4	34.7	56.8
French mostly	11.0	11.8	2.8	1.9	1.7
French Group	35.9	47.4	42.2	36.6	58.5
Flemish only	44.0	37.1	50.3	56.9	36.4
Flemish mostly	18.2	14.8	7.0	5.3	3.8
Flemish Group	62.2	51.9	57.3	62.2	40.2
German Group	1.9	0.8	0.6	1.2	1.4
Total, 3 Groups^a	100.0	100.1	100.1	100.0	100.1
<i>Multilinguals</i>					
% of All Speakers	30.3	27.1	10.2	7.8	6.3
% of French Group	30.6	24.9	6.5	5.2	2.9
% of Flemish Group	29.3	28.5	12.2	8.6	9.4
Flemish for 100 French	96	114	187	166	327

SOURCE: Computed from numerical data in 1910 census.

a Decimal due to rounding.

Our understanding of specific linguistic situations is made more precise by Table 10, which can be viewed as a linguistic map of Belgium in tabular form. The nine provinces have been divided into a total of seventeen units by separating linguistically deviant parts from the rest; these units have then been regrouped into three larger wholes, the Flemish region, the Brussels area, and the Walloon region. As a general

Table 10 Languages in 1910, Spatial Distribution (In %)

	% of Total population	LANGUAGE GROUPS (%)					MULTILINGUALS (%)		
		Flemish	French	German	Index of Dominance	Speakers	Flemish Group	French Group	Multilinguals (% of Total)
Antwerp, City	4.1	88.8	7.8	3.4	78	26.4	21.9	64.7	7.6
Antwerp, Remainder	9.0	98.0	1.7	0.3	96	10.1	9.0	60.1	6.3
West Flanders Prov.	11.8	93.4	6.5	0.1	87	15.4	13.6	40.9	12.1
East Flanders, Ghent City	2.2	91.9	7.9	0.2	84	27.0	22.9	73.7	4.3
East Flanders, Remainder	12.8	98.6	1.4	0.0	97	8.8	8.1	53.3	8.5
Limburg Province	3.7	95.0	4.8	0.2	90	12.1	11.2	27.0	3.1
Brabant, Louvain Ardt.	3.6	94.0	5.9	0.2	88	15.0	13.0	46.1	3.8
Brabant, Brussels Ardt. ^a	4.6	90.3	9.5	0.3	81	16.0	13.1	42.2	5.1
Total, Region	51.8								50.8
Brabant, Brussels Commune	2.4	46.0	52.0	2.0	4	54.9	63.3	47.1	9.4
Brabant, 10 Brussels Suburbs	6.8	44.8	53.8	1.4	8	46.2	48.5	43.7	22.4
Total, Region	9.2								31.8
Brabant, Nivelles Ardt.	2.4	1.6	98.3	0.1	97	4.3	53.4	3.6	0.7
Hainaut, 5 Communes	1.7	5.5	94.4	0.3	89	8.5	46.6	6.1	1.0
Hainaut, Remainder	14.9	2.7	97.3	0.1	94	4.1	51.9	2.7	4.3
Liège, City	2.3	2.5	96.5	1.0	93	14.6	66.6	12.9	2.4
Liège, Remainder	9.7	3.6	93.8	2.6	88	8.6	46.9	6.0	5.9
Luxemburg	3.1	0.2	85.4	14.4	71	11.7	71.4	2.9	2.6
Namur	4.9	0.4	99.5	0.1	99	1.8	49.9	1.6	0.6
Total, Region	39.0								17.5
Kingdom	100.0	54.0	44.9	1.1	8	14.2	16.0	11.0	100.1^b

SOURCE: Computed from numerical data in 1910 census.

^a Excludes Brussels Commune and ten Brussels suburbs.

^b Decimal due to rounding.

reference, the percentage of total population living in each of the units has been given in column 1. Columns 2, 3, and 4 give the percentage distribution of the three language groups in each unit. Column 5 gives a simple "Index of Dominance" for each unit.⁶¹ Columns 6, 7,

61 The "Index of Dominance" is calculated by subtracting from the largest language group (expressed as a percentage indicator) the sum of the other two. A totally homogeneous unit = 100, an evenly divided one = 0. Theoretically, with three language groups, a negative number is possible (e.g., 45% - [40% + 15%]), but there was no such unit in Belgium at the level of aggregation used in the present table.

and 8 provide the percentage indicators already discussed—multilinguals, and multilinguals among French and Flemish users. Column 9 gives the percentage of all multilinguals living in each unit and may be compared with Column 1. It is quite obvious that whereas Belgium as a whole was a linguistically heterogeneous country, most of the population in 1910 lived, as it did in 1846, in geographical environments where one of the two major languages was clearly dominant. Fourteen of the units cluster in the upper quartile of the index (Namur Province, 99, to Antwerp City, 78); the heterogeneity of Luxemburg Province is due to its German-speaking minority; and only the two Brussels units, which contain under 10 percent of the national population, have an Index of Dominance that is at or below the national level.

The “linguistic encounters” are therefore of special interest. In the four Flemish provinces, 4.1 percent of the *speakers* used mostly French, compared with 3.2 percent of the *total* population in 1846; for the Flemish region as defined in Table 10, the percentage was 4.7. In absolute numbers, however, the French users had doubled. In Antwerp Province, where the percentage itself had risen from 1.7 percent of the total population in 1846 to 3.6 of the speakers in 1910, the numbers had increased fourfold, from 7,045 (including children) to 33,413 (excluding children under two). This phenomenon was largely replicated in East Flanders, where it reflected what had happened in Ghent. Together, Antwerp City and Ghent, each with about 8 percent French users, contained about one-fourth of the French users in the Flemish region. Ostend and Bruges (West Flanders) as well as Hasselt (Limburg) had smaller French-using urban minorities. Outside of these urban areas, the French-using population of the Flemish region was found mostly in communities along the linguistic line, where the use of French was gaining over Flemish.⁶² By contrast, in the four Walloon provinces, the percentage of Flemish users had declined slightly from 2.7 in 1846 to 2.5 in 1910; the percentage is the same for the region as defined in Table 10. The absolute numbers, however, had increased by nearly half. There were no counterparts to Antwerp and Ghent. In Liège, only about 2.5 percent of the population were Flemish users, less than one-third of the proportion of French users found in Ghent and Antwerp. Furthermore, it is almost certain

62 See examples in Levy, “La Statistique,” 522.

that most of them were not Flemish-speaking Belgians but Dutch-speaking Netherlanders.⁶³ The largest concentration of *Belgian* Flemish users in the Walloon region was found in a cluster of five communes over 20,000 in Charleroi District (Province Hainaut), the largest towns of an industrial and extractive area known as the *Centre*, where they constituted a little more than 5 percent of the speakers. The remaining Flemish-using minorities of the region were very unevenly distributed in the several provinces. Namur and Luxemburg together had only about 2,000 out of a speaker population of nearly 600,000. Except for a smaller replication of the *Centre* phenomenon in Liège Province, the Flemish speakers were found mostly in communes just south of the language line but administratively located in an otherwise Walloon province. It is noteworthy that where the language line nearly coincided with the Netherlands border (northwestern corner of Liège Province), there were no Dutch-language urban areas comparable to French-speaking Mouscron in the West. In short, proximity to France and to the linguistic line must be added to the influences of the center and of the residential urban minorities as sources of francophonic assimilation of Flemish speakers; proximity to the Netherlands and to the linguistic line did not have much effect on the language of Walloons.

The spatial distribution of multilinguals confirms the uneven distribution between the two language groups already noted in the course of cross-sectional analysis and reveals additional variations of some interest. If columns 1 and 9 of Table 10 are compared, we see that the Flemish region, which contained about 52 percent of the total population, had 51 percent of all multilinguals; the Brussels area, with 9 percent of the population, 32 percent; and the Walloon region, with 39 percent of the population, only 18 percent. The processes underlying this distribution can be further specified. Minorities, regardless of language group, tended to be highly multilingual (for the French users in the Flemish region, the range is 27–54 percent, with a median between 47 and 53; for the Flemish users in the Walloon region, the range is 50–71, with a median at 52); and urban residence

63 There were 4,135 “Flemish” users in the city. The census also enumerated 5,287 Netherlands nationals and 4,612 persons born in the Netherlands (*Recensement Général* [Brussels, 1910], III, 210, 229). Even if one takes into consideration the overlap between them and the fact that these numbers include children under two, it is clear that most “Flemish” users in Liège were not Belgians.

may be thought of as an independent factor which added to the multilingualism of minorities.⁶⁴

It is also possible to identify the contributions of specific situations to the nationwide processes of language change and to infer from them elements which contributed to the political transformation with which we are concerned. A detailed cross-sectional analysis of the male populations of Antwerp (city) and Ghent, the details of which are omitted here for lack of space, reveals that nearly one-third of the adult males were multilingual. Although this was mostly due to the fact that over one-fourth of the Flemish-using majority knew French, the percentage of multilinguals among the French users in the two cities was the highest in the country.⁶⁵ There is an extraordinarily high level of multilingualism in the youngest age categories, a phenomenon which cannot be accounted for solely by formal education, but which suggests that there were in Antwerp and Ghent many French-using families for whom multilingualism was an attribute of long standing. Hence, the fourfold increase in the number of French users in Antwerp between 1846 and 1910, and the somewhat lesser increase in Ghent, were probably due more to the steady transfer of local Flemish-using families into the French group than to immigration from the Walloon region. A parallel analysis of the male population of the five communes of the *Centre* district, where the largest Flemish minority in the Walloon region was located, provides an interesting contrast. Both French and Flemish users were overwhelmingly working class, but the French users were a resident population while the Flemish users included many immigrants. At all age levels, the minority is more multilingual than the majority; and although the Flemish-using minority here is much less multilingual than the French-using minority in Antwerp and Ghent, it is considerably more so in relation to the local majority than is the case in those two cities. Among adult males, half of the Flemish users know French, compared with three-fourths of French users in Ghent who know Flemish and two-thirds in Antwerp; but only one-third as many French users here know Flemish as Flemish users know French in Antwerp and Ghent.

64 Incidentally, the high degree of multilingualism of German users confirms the pattern of high multilingualism for isolated minorities.

65 In Antwerp, about 1 percent of the male population was born in France and about half as many were French nationals. In Ghent, 1.6 percent were born in France, but this undoubtedly included many born among temporary Belgian migrants; only 0.4 percent of Ghent males were French nationals.

If we assume that the presence of any minority would produce at least some multilingualism among the majority, then the surplus multilingualism of the Flemish users *in their own region* can be understood as a consequence of the cumulative effects of differences in the sociological character of minorities and the independent impact of the center. Neither in Liège, closer in physical distance to the language line than Antwerp or Ghent, and as close to the Netherlands border as Antwerp, nor in the *Centre*, where Flemings had been coming to work for three quarters of a century, did the presence of Flemish or Dutch users of any kind have much linguistic impact on Walloon residents. By contrast, Flemish industrial workers in Walloon areas contributed to the extension of French when they returned to their home regions; those who stayed home learned more French than the Walloons did Flemish; and the leading Flemish cities themselves acted as relay amplifiers for the French cultural center radiating from Brussels.

With a population of 1,023,327 in 1910, Brussels District contained 14 percent of the total population of Belgium. It was the only administrative district whose population was genuinely heterogeneous from a linguistic point of view. Of the speakers, about 40 percent used French, 60 percent Flemish, and 1 percent German.⁶⁶ Moreover, 38 percent were multilingual, the highest proportion for any district in the country. This high level represented the recent acceleration of an older trend. Whereas the “speaker” population increased by 54 percent between 1880 and 1890, the multilinguals increased by 166 percent. As Table 11 indicates, the biggest increase in absolute numbers and in percentage occurred between 1880 and 1890, when the total population increased by 13 percent, but multilinguals by 101 percent. That the multilinguals were to a large extent Flemish users (both indigenous to the city and immigrants) can be inferred from the fact that the absolute number of Flemish unilinguals decreased by 17 percent during the same decade. From 1890 to 1900, the absolute numbers increased in each category; but immigrants from the Walloon region could contribute only to the growth of French unilinguals, while immigrants from the Flemish region, where the knowledge of French was more widespread, contributed both to Flemish unilinguals and to multilinguals. The same pattern was continued during the following decade. Hence, it stands to reason that the percentage of speakers who knew

66 The relatively large number of residents born in France, the Netherlands, etc. did not significantly affect the distributions; many of the German speakers, however, were foreign-born or foreign nationals.

French went up steadily, while the percentage of speakers who knew Flemish decreased somewhat.

Whatever happened from 1880 on to result in the linguistic situation we find in 1910 did not happen evenly throughout Brussels District. In that year, one-third of its population lived in 112 communes below 20,000 (total population 339,425), in an area which shared the general characteristics of the Flemish region (see Table 10). It was the commune of Brussels (population 177,048) and ten surrounding communes over 20,000 (total population 506,854) which constituted

Table 11 Languages in Brussels *Arrondissement*, 1880–1910^a

	1880	1890	1900	1910
Total Speakers	637,829	720,857	809,203	982,074
<i>% of Speakers</i>				
French only	16.5	15.6	17.9	21.7
Flemish only	61.0	45.2	42.1	40.1
German only	0.6	0.3	0.4	0.4
<i>% Multilingual</i>				
French & Flemish	20.4	35.9	36.4	34.5
French & German	0.7	1.0	1.2	1.4
Flemish & German	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.1
All Three	0.7	1.8	1.9	1.8
Total	21.9	38.9	39.7	37.8
<i>% Speakers Who Know</i>				
French	38.3	54.3	57.4	59.4
Flemish	82.2	83.1	80.6	76.5
<i>Index of Increase</i>				
Total Speakers	100	113	127	154
French only	100	107	137	202
Flemish only	100	83	88	101
German only	100	59	70	93
Multilinguals	100	201	230	266

SOURCE: Computed from numerical data in 1910 Census.

a Includes Brussels Commune and ten suburban communes.

the truly heterogeneous region of Belgium.⁶⁷ The situation there is presented in Table 12. In Brussels proper, where about two-thirds of the population spoke Flemish in the 1840s, now a slight majority used French most frequently. This was also the case in the ten communes. In addition, more than half of the adult males in Brussels and about half in the ten communes were multilingual; of these, more than 95 percent were at least French-Flemish bilinguals. The fact that in both cases those about to enter adult life—the 15 to 20 age group—were even more multilingual than adults probably reflects the expansion of elementary education; furthermore, both language groups started with

Table 12 Major Languages in 1910, Male Residents of Brussels and Suburbs, By Age (In Percent)

	Brussels			10 Suburbs (Communes)		
	2-14	15-20	≥ 21	2-14	15-20	≥ 21
<i>Speakers</i>						
French Group	43.6	47.4	53.5	46.7	48.1	55.0
Flemish Group	56.7	50.0	44.0	52.3	50.4	43.4
<i>Multilinguals</i>						
% All Speakers	47.8	62.7	58.1	36.6	53.0	49.0
% French Group	42.0	54.8	50.5	37.8	52.3	47.5
% Flemish Group	51.9	73.4	70.7	36.3	55.2	53.8
Flemish/100 French	123	134	140	96	106	113
<i>Sex Ratio</i>						
French Group	95	80	76	99	78	78
Flemish Group	100	89	82	99	90	87
<i>Age Structure (→100)</i>						
French Group	17.3	10.7	72.1	9.9	19.9	70.2
Flemish Group	24.1	12.1	63.7	25.3	11.8	62.9

SOURCE: Computed from numerical data in 1910 Census.

67 Brussels and the ten communes (Anderlecht, Etterbeek, Forest, Ixelles, Laeken, Molenbeek St. Jean, Schaerbeek, St. Gilles, St. Josse-ten-Noode, and Uccle), whose population totaled 683,702, did not quite coincide with the administrative area known as *Agglomération bruxelloise*, the “Capital district,” which had a population of 748,654. Although the latter is a politically more relevant unit than the one used here because its linguistic status became a bone of contention, we cannot reconstruct it from the 1910 census because the relevant data are not aggregated in the appropriate form for the cross-sectional analysis attempted in this paper.

a very high level of multilingualism among the youngest age group, an indication of intergenerational transmission of two languages in some cases.

Living in the same urban area, the two language groups nevertheless retained characteristically different age structures, which account in part for the changing ratios between them for the several age categories. Whereas a clear majority of the youngest males were Flemish users in both Brussels and the ten communes, the situation was reversed among adults. For both groups, there was a surplus of adult women, in keeping with a pattern found in Ghent and Antwerp; the greater surplus in the French group may have been due to transfers by way of marriage, as suggested earlier. It is quite clear that the two language groups contributed unevenly to the multilingual character of the city as a whole. Whereas in the surrounding communes, they began at about the same level of multilingualism in the lowest age category and increased at approximately the same pace, in Brussels proper the Flemish started higher and became relatively even more multilingual than the French users in the older age groups, at which point they approximately equaled the record level achieved by the French users in Ghent.

As already suggested, at such high levels it is appropriate to speak of “family multilingualism,” and the likelihood of intergenerational transfers from one language group to the other becomes strong. There is little doubt that many of the multilingual French users found in Brussels in 1910 (as in Antwerp and Ghent) were former Flemish users or their descendants. We can therefore conclude that the contributions of Flemish users to the bilingualism of Brussels, and indirectly to that of Belgium, were even greater than the census data suggest, while those made by the French users were more limited. If we take the most likely census errors into account, these conclusions are further reinforced. Census officials stated that in Brussels many who knew French did not report it because of “Flamingant pressures”; if true, this would further raise the level of bilingualism among Flemish users.⁶⁸ On the other hand, it is very likely that, given the prestige of French, many of the bilinguals who declared that they used French most often treated the census as an opportunity for wish fulfillment; if true, this would lower the level of bilingualism among genuine French users. However unreliable the declarations may have been from

68 Reported by Levy, “La Statistique,” 529.

a strictly linguistic point of view, they nevertheless confirm the point stressed throughout this paper, namely, that the linguistic segmentation of Belgium reflected choices made by individuals in response to a politicized cultural situation rather than to an amorphous “cultural given.”

Viewed from the vantage point of the Belgian political establishment at the beginning of the twentieth century, these trends were mildly encouraging. Whatever the *Flamingants* might say, the fact that an expanding segment of the Flemish-speaking population was acquiring a knowledge of French demonstrated their acquiescence in the liberal assimilationist formula that had been institutionalized during previous decades. The French-speaking minority north of the language line was growing, particularly in the dynamic cities. The fairness of the bilingual status of the Flemish provinces was confirmed by the fact that their inhabitants generated genuine demands for public services, including education, in French. The availability of such facilities in turn eased further movement toward French culture as the Flemings finally modernized. The increasingly French character of the capital city’s own population was a reassuring counterweight to the grant of official parity to Flemish. On the whole, in spite of the Flemish demographic thrust, which the Catholic Party particularly welcomed, Belgium would be able to maintain under conditions of mass politics its traditionally French-dominant national identity.

Viewed from a *Flamingant* vantage point, however, the trends were disastrous.⁶⁹ Among *Flamingants*, the backwardness of the Flemish region had been attributed for some time to the fact that the upper classes were separated from them by language.⁷⁰ In Antwerp and Ghent, as well as perhaps in lesser cities, so long as upward mobility was relatively limited, its pace was probably at one with gradual movement into the French-user group. As they began to experience economic development, however, the middle class expanded; and although more of them became French users, upward mobility probably outran the acquisition of French culture. It was during that very period that the Flemish-minded pressed their claims for the institutionalization of secondary education in Flemish. By the beginning of the twentieth century, there were probably numerous families in these

69 Elias, *Geschiedenis*, IV, 4, 324, 344. See also the same author’s follow-up study, *Vijfentwintig Jaar Vlaamse Beweging, 1914/1939* (Antwerp, 1969; 4 v.), I, 201.

70 See the 1869 debate related by Clough, *History*, 91–94.

cities whose claim to middle-class status, founded on economic and educational achievement, was jeopardized by the fact that they had not become assimilated into French culture. This type of “status incongruity” often leads to the rise of challenges to an existing culture of stratification, i.e., attempts to alter the criteria on which the stratification system rests.

It was to a large extent in Antwerp and Ghent that a new, secular-minded generation, educated in Flemish in public secondary schools as a result of the reforms instituted a generation earlier, produced many of the individuals and groups who formulated and sustained a new *Flamingant* ideology. In the absence of higher rungs in the educational ladder, they faced a linguistic deadend; and, more generally, it was this stratum which experienced most acutely the lasting stigma attached to their culture in Belgium. Whether or not they were democrats by inclination, they could not hope for a solution to their problem without formulating a program which associated their situation with that of the people. But now that the population was beginning to modernize, it was becoming more francophonic. Furthermore, under conditions of mass politics, the growth of French north of the language line would reduce the weight which that area might otherwise carry in the Belgian political process. The new Flemish-cultured intellectuals were the aspiring elite of a dwindling people.

Around the turn of the century, a succession of Flemish intellectuals stressed, in somewhat different ways, the futility of a movement that was merely linguistic in its orientation. The Flemish movement was—or should transform itself into—a social movement directed, first of all, against the *Franskiljon* bourgeoisie of Flanders. Furthermore, the Flemish problem was not merely a matter of achieving formal linguistic equality but a matter of distributive justice. Given the situation, this could not be achieved merely by granting rights to individuals. What was required was the modernization of the Flemish region in *Flemish* through economic, social, and educational development capped substantively and symbolically by a Flemish-language university where a new responsible and responsive elite could be formed. These claims were founded on the rights of Flemings as a *people*.

It was not as a result of the activities of *Flamingants* alone, however, but as a consequence of the interactions between defenders and opponents of the *status quo* that the linguistic question in Belgium, which had been for the most part a matter of debate over specific policies concerning public services, was transformed into a profound

ideological debate over nationality. That such debates had been common in Europe for most of the previous century—Belgium, after all, experienced one at its very beginning—does not make “nationalism” a cause of the transformation that occurred in Belgium. Rather, the categories of discourse which “nationalism” spawned provided a generally available mold within which the Belgians could argue among themselves over issues stemming from their own changing situation. An explicit integrative ideology, congruent with the orientation of the existing regime, was becoming more necessary in Belgium as in the rest of Europe as the extension of political participation and the reliance on mass armies for national defense generated the need to educate the populace within a common civic framework from which individual obligations could be derived. As traditional beliefs waned under the impact of modernization, the “past” became politically critical. The integrative framework therefore took the form of national histories, rapidly incorporated into educational curricula at all levels. It was partly in response to *Flamingant* stirrings that the “Belgian national view” was in the process of being formalized in the monumental *Histoire de Belgique* (1893) written by Henri Pirenne, which began with an essay on the subject of nationality, patterned explicitly after Renan’s.⁷¹ And it was, in turn, in response to Pirenne and his epigones that the *Flamingants* stressed an alternative interpretation.

A major point of contention concerned the causes and consequences of the separation of the Low Countries at the end of the sixteenth century. In his initial plan, Pirenne stressed that the early history of Belgium cannot be extricated from that of the Low Countries region more generally; but from 1598 on, “the unity of political development and of civilization is broken forever. Two different states, two distinct nationalities come into being, having henceforth nothing in common.”⁷² One could easily conclude that Belgium was therefore a country whose population spoke more than one language but was united by a common secular experience; it constituted one nation, one people, for whom 1830 was the inexorable outcome, and for whom bilingualism was an equitable settlement. In the fourth volume of his history, published in 1911, Pirenne demonstrated that because, prior to the middle of the sixteenth century, the Flemish and Walloon southern provinces of the Low Countries had more in

71 Ernest Renan, “Qu’est ce qu’une nation?” *Discours et Conférences* (Paris, 1887).

72 Henri Pirenne, *Bibliographie de l’histoire de Belgique* (Gand, 1893), vii.

common with one another than the Flemish had with Holland and Zeeland, the geopolitical outcome of the struggle was in accord with indigenous sensibilities; 1598 was the critical date because Archduke Albert was installed with the general consent of local elites.⁷³

It was as the result of contacts with *Flamingant* students in the very year of that publication that the Dutch historian Geyl elaborated a counterposition. As he saw it, Pirenne was a Walloon teaching history in French to Flemish students at the University of Ghent, who “occupied an advanced post in the movement of penetration and conquest which French civilization, under the auspices of the centralized Belgian state, was carrying on in Flanders.”⁷⁴ The “Belgian national view,” Geyl believed, was complemented by the “Little Netherlands” view that his own countrymen had developed in the nineteenth century to rationalize the settlement of 1839. In Geyl’s hypothesis—which sought to undermine both positions and which he also used as the foundation for a general argument concerning the role of “accident” in history—ethnicity, expressed by way of language, was the main source of cultural differentiation in the Low Countries prior to the sixteenth century.⁷⁵ The regions of Germanic speech, grouped around the Flanders-Brabant-Holland core, responded positively to the Reformation; the French-speaking regions vacillated but, once Calvinism was stifled in France, remained mostly Catholic. Had history taken its natural course, there would have emerged a homogeneously Dutch-speaking, Protestant entity north of the language line, leaving the Walloon provinces eventually to be absorbed by France. Instead, the actual line of separation was determined by the inability of the Spaniards to subdue Holland and Zeeland rebels protected by the river deltas. Rather than 1598, the fateful date was 1609, the year of the armistice, when the Flemings were unwillingly separated from the remainder of their “race” (*stam*). Hence, although the Netherlands was a true nation, Belgium was an artificial creation containing parts of two distinct nationalities, one of which legitimately yearned to be

73 See esp. *ibid.*, 125–136, 150. For an example of the “Belgian national view” as it appeared in more popular form, see Frans Van Kalken, *La Belgique Contemporaine* (Paris, 1930). I can testify from personal experience that this view was incorporated in numerous school histories.

74 Elias *Geschiedenis*, IV, 294; Pieter Geyl, *Debates with Historians* (New York, 1957), 199. This book contains reprints of “debates” in which Geyl engaged much earlier.

75 The summary is based on Pieter Geyl, *The Revolt of the Netherlands, 1555–1609* (New York, 1966). This is the English translation of a section of Geyl’s *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandsche Stam*, a provocative title in the context of the ongoing debate over “nationality”; see esp. the argument at 174–175.

reunited with its Dutch brethren, or would do so if and when its consciousness was raised.

Our concern here is neither to establish historical truth concerning the events of the sixteenth century nor to establish whether or not the “debate” had specific political consequences in the twentieth. In fact, about 1911 equally few Flemings favored reunification with the Netherlands as Netherlanders did with the Flemish region of Belgium. What matters is that the “debate” reveals an important aspect of the transformation of the Belgian “language problem” into something else. At a time when the Flemish movement was acquiring a broader base and had become concerned with regional development, Geyl and others contributed an ethnic foundation to the *Flamingant* ideology. Whether the Flemings constituted a language group or an ethnic group was not a “merely symbolic” question, nor only a matter of psychic satisfaction. On the basis of linguistic attributes, the Flemings were a shrinking majority; on the basis of ethnicity, an attribute over which individuals could not exercise much choice, they were more numerous and would probably continue to grow relatively more than the Walloon population. Numbers themselves were determinative as a foundation for distributive claims and linguistic legislation in a representative regime where proportionality had become an established principle of equity in other spheres of political life.

But how could an ethnic headcount be institutionalized, given the ambiguity of the criteria on which it must be founded, and given the constraints imposed by liberal political traditions? It is not surprising that the “primordial givens” which emerged specifically reflected the political realities in Belgium at the beginning of the twentieth century. Most obviously, *soil* rather than *language* was advocated as the foundation of group identity. The language line must become a *legal* line demarcating symmetrically unilingual regional units which would exist in addition to communes and provinces. The presence in the Flemish region of a *Franskiljon* minority—ethnic Flemings who used French—came to be viewed as an undesirable consequence of past power relationships, policies, and sociological trends, which must be reversed. The old battle cry, *In Vlaanderen Vlaamsch* (“In Flanders Flemish”), which had signified a demand for the extension of public services in the Flemish language, now took on the meaning “Flemish *only*,” which signified a demand for the removal of French-language symbols, services, and educational facilities from the region. Moreover, where the territorial criterion was unlikely to be enforceable—i.e., in

the multilingual Brussels enclave within Flemish territory—Flemings must be identified on the basis of descent itself, in so far as that was possible. In practice, it meant that in a multilingual environment, linguistic filiation—“maternal language”—rather than actual usage and preference should determine the entrance of children into one or the other educational stream. In this as well as in other respects, the shift from language to ethnicity promoted by the *Flamingants* required that the Belgian state depart from its neutral stance, which favored francophonic assimilation, and imposed on individuals, directly or indirectly, the *obligation* to learn the language of their ethnic group as well as to use it in the course of the more public aspects of life.

French speakers, meanwhile, resisted the extension of official bilingualism because, however imperfectly implemented, it imposed some new costs on them and reduced the value of their hitherto costless membership in the dominant cultural group. While party politicians from Brussels and Walloon constituencies, constrained by the trans-regional character of their clienteles, reluctantly reached a succession of compromises with their counterparts from Flemish constituencies, some Walloons were beginning to react in a manner mirroring the *Flamingants*. Although the “Walloon movement” has been less well studied, there is evidence that, during the first decade of the century, Walloon intellectuals—sometimes called *Wallingants*—began to voice the principle of ethnic self-determination as a foundation from which to resist further bilingualization of the Belgian center and to offset the consequences of a likely increase in the Flemish proportion of the Belgian population in later decades of the twentieth century.⁷⁶ It was a Walloon spokesman, rather than a Flemish one, who informed the King in 1912 that there were no Belgians in Belgium. Walloon resistance complemented Flemish aspirations. Since it was hopeless to strive for equity by way of bilingualism, equity could be achieved only when it was no longer necessary for *any* Belgians to use a language other than that of their ethnic group in order to participate in public life.

During the two decades preceding World War I, as Belgian society moved toward political democracy, both Flemings and Walloons produced vanguard organizations which formulated and propagandized ideologies concerned with the reorganization of Belgium to achieve

76 J. Gotovich, “La légation d’Allemagne et le Mouvement Flamand entre 1867 et 1914,” *Revue Belge de Philologie et d’Histoire*, XLV (1967), 473.

congruence between language, territory, and ethnic group. Although a different kind of analysis would be required to ascertain how far their activities affected the socialization of the Belgian population more generally, it is clear that the new definition of the situation, which stressed the rights of peoples and of their cultures as well as the obligations of individuals toward their ethnic communities, rather than the rights of individuals to obtain public services in the language of their choice and their freedom to change their culture, had already found a somewhat wider audience among the strata of the population most affected by the costs of existing arrangements. That there also grew between Flemings and Walloons the sort of intensely antagonistic sentiment that is usually called "hatred," and which is usually assumed to provide the irrational motive at the root of political mobilization and intensive conflict in situations of this sort, is unlikely. To the extent that the Belgian communities were mobilized on and off in the twentieth century, it was usually for action against the government rather than for action against each other.

Our understanding of the politics of culturally segmented societies can be enhanced by a distinction between the *intensity* and the *extent* of conflict. The Belgian case illustrates why, notwithstanding the growth of intergroup communications and perhaps even of intergroup empathy, in the course of modernization cultural segmentations are likely to produce more *extensive* political conflict. When the cultural segments have a spatial character, regional unevenness of industrialization—which is the rule rather than the exception—may exacerbate previous inequities or even produce new ones. More generally, modernization reveals hitherto hidden advantages and disadvantages of membership in different cultural segments with respect to opportunities for upward mobility and also creates a new scale of costs. It matters relatively little which language one speaks—or how that language is regarded—in a society where most individuals are engaged in agriculture, or even in artisanal or factory jobs associated with the early stages of industrialization. It matters much more when much of the population is occupied in the tertiary sector, particularly in white-collar occupations accessible on the basis of educational achievement, or aspires to rise into this new middle class. As the occupational structure becomes more bureaucratic and access to higher status roles is defined on the basis of specific cultural skills, norms that sustain institutional discrimination—whether or not of a legal character—tend to be established by the earlier arrivals and, hence, protect their advantage.

Such obstacles are more clearly perceived by late comers when their social progress reaches the level where these obstacles matter, sometimes quite a while after it was thought that they had obtained equitable formal rights.

Settlements institutionalized under conditions of limited suffrage—or, after the establishment of universal suffrage, under conditions of limited political participation—often become incongruous when effective citizenship is extended to the whole people, whose composition is very different with respect to the relevant cultural attributes. The institutionalization of a system of political allocation responsive to numbers by way of constituency pressures may significantly alter the bargaining power of different groups. Under these conditions, it is not surprising that deprived groups seek to maximize the power of their numbers by emphasizing the particular definition of group identity that will produce the greatest number of categoric members, and by reorganizing the polity so that the weight of spatially-specific majorities will be maximized. There is, therefore, a general thrust toward appropriate forms of decentralization.

As the process of transformation occurs, justice for the culture as a whole becomes a goal valued in itself, quite independently of the instrumental concerns related to the upward mobility of individuals that usually gave rise to the issue in the first place. Where there has existed a long history of cultural inequality, its consequences are so deeply imbedded in the general culture of the relevant society—quite independently of the dispositions of individuals—that the process of rectification of wrongs is almost endless. Beneath every stone there lies a prejudicial stereotype. When solidarity falters, another wrong can be turned up to serve as a rallying flag. In the course of its struggle for equity, the deprived group develops a corps of specialists in this sort of search; and it is not surprising that they keep at it, even when injustice is no longer visible to someone who is not involved. The issues that arise always concern attempts to equalize costs one way or another; for example, by reducing the burdens that weigh heavily on one side only, or by imposing similar burdens on the other side. Solutions which facilitate individual mobility may clash with others oriented toward collective improvement. Pressures grow to prevent members of the underprivileged group who can pass into the more privileged strata or who can at least operate successfully within the established system from leaving the group and hence depriving it of much needed talent and leadership. This can be done by stressing the

obligations which stem from “ascriptive” attributes, regardless of achievement or of individual preferences. Sometimes the paradoxical result is that past victims of discrimination borrow elements of their identity from their oppressors. In any case, points of contention are multiplied not only between the advantaged and the disadvantaged but, in both, between advocates of different strategies.

Much as certain stages of modernization produce class conflict which henceforth shares the social and political arena to a greater or lesser extent with the pursuit of advantage by individuals and discrete interest groups, so in the cultural sphere there is a collectivization of conflict which does not exclude more discrete processes of change. The collective aspect, however, entails a pursuit of justice in the course of which public control over the lives of citizens is necessarily extended. Simultaneously, and independently of the process with which we are concerned here, additional spheres of social life become matters of governmental concern. The two processes interact to reveal functional relationships between many spheres of public policy and the cultural situation. Cultural issues are therefore increasingly politicized, in the sense that their settlement requires authoritative decision-making for the whole society, and politics is generally culturalized, in the sense that, potentially, most aspects of public policy are affected by the cultural segmentation. The scope of conflict is thus vastly extended.

A feature which lends additional weight to the notion that conflict related to cultural segmentations is more intractable than that which stems from other sources is that “solutions” are seldom definitive. However, this appears to be a much less peculiar feature if we think of changes in the allocation of costs to members of different groups as the equivalent of a redistribution of income in the economic realm. Since the allocation of “costs” is never satisfactorily fixed once and for all, and since costs can be reckoned in different ways from various perspectives, it should not be surprising that cultural issues, once they have arisen, do not disappear any more than do economic ones. As in other spheres of political activity, however, one can distinguish between “regime issues,” concerning fundamental rules of the game, and ordinary issues which involve bargaining within the limits imposed by established rules. Because we clearly acknowledge the difference, for example, between a struggle for the establishment of a right to collective bargaining, for universal suffrage, or for progressive taxation, and negotiations over particular contracts, particular political competitions, or tax reform of a more limited scope, we do not view

the persistence of concern with the latter sorts of questions as peculiar or pathological. An examination of the course of cultural issues in Belgium before or after the transformation identified in the present essay reveals that it has consisted of a long series of compromises and partial settlements. That these compromises usually occur only after a period of relatively intense crisis produced by the rise of a "regime issue," that they are achieved by a sort of treaty-making process among leading contenders, that they are seldom satisfactory to all parties concerned, and that one or the other of these parties seeks to maximize its advantage under the new settlement, establishes, more than any other feature, the fundamental similarity between this and other spheres of political activity in Belgium. In the light of the proposition that issues arising from the existence of subcultures are different in kind from others and are particularly difficult to manage, this similarity is peculiar. Is Belgium an exception? Or must the proposition be revised?

During the subsequent half century, the regime issue was neither fully resolved nor left unresolved. Its specific course, including the rise and fall of tension over "the problem of communities," was shaped not only by the total social and political environment of Belgium but also by changes in the international region within which the society is located. It mattered a great deal, for example, that whereas industrialization in the nineteenth century favored the Walloon region, beginning in the middle third of the twentieth the spatial distribution of economic development was to a large extent reversed. It mattered a great deal that during the period covered in the present essay the international context, in which other powers were generally committed to the survival of Belgium, established limits within which alternatives to the status quo were expressed, but that beginning in 1914, in Belgium as elsewhere in Europe, Romance and Germanic cultures became identified with alternative regime orientations. Furthermore, changes in the international situation between 1910 and the present significantly affected the extent to which political decentralization was or was not thought to jeopardize the survival of Belgium at various times. Since the changing features of political life in Belgium cannot be accounted for by the intrinsic character of the cultural segmentation itself, it is apparent that the "cultural givens" in this or any other society can be treated as independent variables only at the risk of perpetrating the sort of gross scientific distortion which hampers the progress of the social sciences.