

Denied ethnicism: on the Walloon movement in Belgium

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ABSTRACT. The Walloon movement is the lesser-known counterpart to the Flemish movement in Belgium. In contemporary political debate it presents itself, and is usually perceived, as a civic and voluntaristic movement predicated on the values of democracy, freedom, openness and anti-nationalism. As such it is contrasted against its Flemish counterpart, which accordingly is characterised as tending towards an ethnic exclusivist form of nationalism hinging on descent, culture and language. However, the historical record behind these representations shows that the Walloon movement is rooted in ethno-cultural as much as social politics, and that it has always contained both civic and ethnic elements to varying degrees. This article highlights the Walloon movement in order to analyse the language and national stereotypes in which national movements are characterised both in political rhetoric and in scholarly analysis. The case is particularly relevant for the problematic usage of the ‘civic–ethnic’ opposition, slipping between the discourses of antagonism and analysis; one type of such slippage is here identified as ‘denied ethnicism’.

KEYWORDS: Belgium, civic and ethnic nationalism, denied ethnicism, Flanders, Wallonia

Competing categories: national identifications in the Low Countries

The complex processes of making and breaking nations are all illustrated in the European microcosm of the Low Countries. In 1815, a strong Kingdom of The Netherlands was created comprising the territory of the present-day Benelux countries, with the Prince of Orange-Nassau as its monarch (from the dynasty that, in the *ancien régime*, had held the Stadholdership of the United Provinces). This realm broke into two (or rather two and a half) parts in 1830. The hegemony of the ‘Dutch’, northern half of the new kingdom had irked the southern portions (the former Austrian Netherlands and Prince-Bishopric of Liège) and triggered liberal-national revolts in 1830, leading to the independence of a new state called Belgium and Luxembourg as a compromise solution (split in two: a Belgian province and a Grand Duchy tied in personal union to the Dutch Crown).¹

After the initial wave of *risorgimento*-style national enthusiasm waned, Belgium began to grapple with the linguistic diversity within its borders. Increasingly, speakers of Flemish² in the north of the country felt marginalised by the fledgling state's Francophone orientation – which was carried by the governing elite and in national institutions, as well as in Belgium's Walloon (i.e. French-speaking) southern half. Dissatisfaction with linguistic discrimination led to what is known as the 'Flemish movement'³; ultimately, a fission in the country's constitutional fabric was institutionalised in the *taalgrens* (linguistic frontier) regulation of 1962. Since then, Belgium has consistently been drifting towards federal or confederal devolution; its two halves have been held together mainly by their shared resolution to maintain a hold on the capital Brussels – a historically Flemish, then predominantly French-speaking and now multilingual city, located within Flemish territory.

Over the past two centuries, the following different articulations and alignments between various cultural communities in the Low Countries have been advanced as 'national' models (with varying degrees of success or mass appeal).

1. The failed state of 1815–1830 (now usually known as the 'United Kingdom of The Netherlands') retains some vestigial presence as the Benelux co-operation framework between The Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg.
2. The present-day kingdoms of The Netherlands and (to a lesser extent) Belgium each enjoy the unreserved national loyalty and identification of a great many of their respective citizens.⁴
3. Within Belgium, many Flemings are committed more emphatically to a Flemish than to a Belgian sense of identity; the more radical among these would favour outright independence.
4. Because of the linguistic community between Flanders and The Netherlands, there is also some sense of cultural or ethnic solidarity. On that basis, a 'Greater Netherlandic' or *Diets* unity and union between Flanders and The Netherlands has been advocated in some circles since the mid-nineteenth century (Leerssen 2007; Van Ginderachter 2009; Wils 1994). Institutionally, a sense of linguistic-cultural community has been consolidated in the *Taalunie* (Language Union), an intergovernmental overseeing body for linguistic matters such as the official orthography. Of late, the scenario of unification has been discussed as a hypothetical option in the Dutch and Flemish media during Belgium's government crises (since the parliamentary elections of 2007).
5. Extreme Flemish and *Diets*-minded circles chose to see themselves as part of a larger pan-Germanic complex and sought to strengthen ties with Germany in their resistance against French(-speaking) influences; this was supported and adopted in expansionist German-nationalist and certain Nazi circles between 1880 and 1945.
6. South of the linguistic frontier, some Francophone Belgians have begun to identify themselves as 'Walloons' since the mid-nineteenth century. Here, again, various modalities can be distinguished.

- (a) Many Walloons (as well as French-speaking inhabitants of the Brussels region) see the Flemish movement largely as a seditious betrayal of the Belgian state, and accordingly see themselves as the 'remaining true Belgians'.
- (b) A small minority feel less Belgian in their loyalty and would favour autonomy for an empowered Wallonia.
- (c) Among the latter group, there is a noticeable trend towards favouring a union between Wallonia and France (known as *rattachisme*). Surprisingly, the argument of *rattachisme* surfaced strongly shortly after 1945, and again in press debates during the government crises of 2007–10.

It should be noted that models 2, 3 and 6a predominate; 6b has marginal appeal; 1 and 5 have lost all ideological pulling power; 4 and 6c may best be described as 'zombie categories' – notions bereft of all realistic relevance but persisting in a vestigial half-life that continues to play a background role. The case as a whole illustrates that in nation and state formation, different models of aggregation exist simultaneously and compete for public favour in what is and remains an open-ended process. Models that fail to achieve political realisation do not simply fade away and disappear, but continue their existence in a latent 'standby' situation; they are possible, but as yet unrealised, alternatives to the status quo.⁵

Like most Flemish–Francophone tensions in the last half a century, the post-2007 crises have revolved largely around Brussels. The suburban periphery of the Belgian capital is located north of the linguistic frontier, and its Flemish-speaking status was constitutionally guaranteed (albeit with important restrictions) in the *taalgrens* arrangement of 1962. As with many metropolitan areas in Europe, there is a population move from the inner city to the greener suburban towns; because these migrants are mainly Francophone, this causes linguistic tensions. Fundamentally, those tensions revolve around the opposition between *ius soli* (the territoriality principle: regional location defines its linguistic regime) and *ius sanguinis* (the personality principle: a population's ethno-cultural appurtenance defines its linguistic regime). Francophone politicians have demanded that Flanders recognises its minorities and have denounced the territoriality principle as backward and untenable in a globalising world (Van Ginderachter 2005); Flemish politicians, for their part, have rejected those arguments as coming from a language community that in the larger Belgian frame is itself hegemonic rather than minoritarian.

Mere political bickering? There is one quality to these arguments that gives them added relevance, namely that they instrumentalise long-standing ethnic images and stereotypes ('ethno-types') as well as a perceived contrast between civic and ethnic nationalism. The broad consensus against Flemish territorialism among Francophone Belgians echoes a widely held perception of Flanders as a nation based on ethno-cultural principles and, as such, prone to xenophobic nationalism. That image of Flanders is symmetrically com-

plemented by its counterpart, a Walloon/Francophone self-image predicated on citizenship, civic values and openness to people from all parts of the world. Therefore, the anti-Flemish stance is described in terms like *Belgitude* (Belgian-ness), 'regionalism' or what is called a 'post-national identity'; the scheme allows for no such thing as Belgian ethnic chauvinism or Walloon nationalism.

This view is expressed repeatedly, even in academic studies. Thus:

The Flemish nation is predominantly represented in ethnic-cultural terms, in the sense that the national identity tends to be viewed as a static cultural heritage that must be defended against outside threats. The Belgian nation, by contrast, is increasingly defined as a civic nation that allows citizens with different cultural backgrounds to live together in harmony. [...] Wallonia is predominantly portrayed as a civic nation. (Billiet, Maddens and Beerten 2003: 255)

Particularly with regard to the Walloon movement, a 'civic' Walloon self-image tends to be taken uncritically at face value:

As far as identity-appurtenance is concerned, those who conceptualise the Walloon identity are true to their self-proclaimed anti-nationalism. They explicitly choose a civic identification rather than a nationalist one. Reflecting on a Walloon-based citizenship allows them to define a collective identity that is purged of determinist and essentialist elements. (Traisnel 2005: 53)⁶

The current image of an 'ethnic' Flanders as opposed to a 'civic' Wallonia has proven so pervasive that it is implicitly taken for granted by most researchers and is projected back into time. This raises multiple issues, which this article will address in the following order. Firstly, we take a closer look at the origin and discourse of the Walloon movement to deconstruct the black-and-white polarity of this schematisation. This in turn raises the question of the rhetorical (as opposed to analytical) strength of the schematisation, which can be related to long-standing ethno-types and cultural stereotypes. Finally, the implications of this case for the vexed question of the 'civic-ethnic' distinction in nationalism studies must be addressed.

Ethnicism and culturalism in the Walloon movement

Closer analysis of sources explodes the overdetermined distinction between a civic Walloon regionalism and an ethnic Flemish nationalism. The history of the Walloon movement and the construction of the Walloon nation since the 1880s demonstrates that the Walloon movement was born, as much as its Flemish counterpart, out of a predominantly ethno-cultural view of nationhood (Van Ginderachter 2005). This is not surprising. The idea of an ancient people sharing blood, culture and language held great appeal at the end of the nineteenth century. All over Europe, national movements vindicated their claims by invoking historical and ethno-cultural roots reaching back into the remote past (Geary 2002; Juaristi 1998; Smith 1999; Thiesse 1999). The supporters of the Walloon movement, known as *wallingants* or Walloonists, were

no different, in that they habitually linked people and territory, as if the former grew organically out of the latter. In 1913, for instance, the Walloon League of Verviers praised 'the firm will of the Verviëtois to defend the race integrity of Wallonia, [. . .] this good Walloon soil, with its ancestral liberties, its unique character, its ethnic qualities and its Gallic atmosphere, that are its praise and strength'.⁷

Two elements tended to muffle the ethno-cultural tonality at the Walloon side while boosting it at the Flemish side. Firstly, the Flemish movement arose within, and in defiance of, the dominant Francophone-Belgian context, which was considered as the default state of normality. Those asserting their loyalty to an exclusively Francophone Belgian nation-state could be more placid and less strident than those contesting it. As such, the Walloon movement was the defence of a dominant (Belgian-Francophone) ethnicity (cf. Kaufmann and Zimmer 2004). Secondly, there was a larger representation of liberals and socialists in the Walloon movement; these people were actively engaged in the struggle for general suffrage and thus strengthened the movement's civic aura. However, it should be realised that before the First World War the suffrage issue did not constitute a core concern in the construction of the Walloon movement's imagined community. It was, rather, during the inter-war period that such civic issues became ever more important as the Walloon movement's antagonist, the Flemish movement, turned towards the extreme right and increasingly wielded an ethnicised vision of Flanders. But such ethnicism was not the exclusive monopoly of the Flemish movement (witness the fascist Francophone organisation Rex), and although the reproach of ethnicism was pointed mainly in the Flemish direction, latently ethnic definitions of what constitutes Wallonia remained influential and remain so to the present day.

Since the Second World War, references to physiognomic qualities such as blood or race have become ever rarer in the Walloon movement. The growing social taboo of that type of discourse was strengthened by the rise of the xenophobic Flemish nationalist party Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang [Flemish Block/Flemish Interest] since the 1980s. Openness, democracy, freedom and anti-nationalism have become the core programme of the Walloon movement. However, ethnic markers have not disappeared completely from its self-portrayal. Blood and race have been supplanted by a 'softer' discourse of ethno-cultural objectivity centred on the shared, immemorial history of the Walloon people. Today, the common descent of the Walloons is often traced back to classical antiquity (although Wallonia is a mid-nineteenth-century invention) and relies heavily on the notion of a Romance or Latin language community. On its website, the government of the Walloon region relates the origin of Wallonia to the Romans:

Julius Caesar conquered Gaul. Our ancestors became the Gallo-Romans and were called the 'Walha' by their Germanic neighbours. Hence the name 'Wallonia'. The 'Walha' abandoned their Celtic dialects and started to speak Vulgar Latin. Already at that time, Wallonia was on the border between the Germanic world and the Latin world.⁸

The long common history of the Walloons is invoked tellingly in the educational package *La Wallonie, Toutes les Cartes en Mains* [Wallonia, all cards in hand], which was composed on behalf of the government of the Walloon region for use in Walloon schools (Delforge 1998). The package is replete with references to a shared primaeval past. The Walloon tradition of freedom is traced back to medieval urban charters (Delforge 1998, comment on carte 26). Most surprisingly *La Wallonie, Toutes les Cartes en Mains* credits Wallonia with a formative role in the creation of the 'Land of the Free':

Managed by the Walloon mayor (1679–1688), Peter de Lanoy (ancestor of Franklin Delano Roosevelt), New York has ingested the freedom spirit which Walloons diffuse all over the world. Incidentally, isn't it a work of [the Walloon painter] Antoine Wiertz that inspired Frederic Auguste Bartholdi's Miss Liberty (the statue of Liberty)?⁹

The invention of Wallonia: culturalist politics

On the whole, Belgian specialists see the Walloon movement as a politically and economically driven political force, and trace it back to the *belle époque*. As a convenient marker for its breakthrough onto the public stage, the name of Jules Destrée is often mentioned. Destrée was a socialist politician and intellectual who in 1912 addressed a notorious and often-quoted letter to the Belgian king 'on the separation between Flanders and Wallonia'. One verbal whiplash has become proverbial: 'il y a en Belgique, des Wallons et des Flamands; il n'y a pas de Belges' [in Belgium there are Walloons and Flemings; there are no Belgians] (Dupuis and Humblet 1998: 41).

Indeed, Destrée's letter to the king occupies a pivotal historical position. Inspired by Destrée, in 1913 an Assemblée Wallonne [Walloon assembly] adopted the various trappings of nationhood, including a flag, a heraldic badge (the Gallic cockerel), a device (*Wallon Toujours* and *Liberté*) and a national holiday (the last Sunday of September, commemorating the expulsion of Dutch troops from Brussels during the 1830 revolution by supposedly 'Walloon' volunteers).¹⁰ But Destrée's letter to the king did not emerge out of nowhere: there had been a build-up in the preceding decades. Walloon unease over the claims and political successes of the Flemish movement had been mounting since the 1870s and had led to the foundation of associations such as Liges Wallonnes in various cities from 1882 onwards. They staged rallies that brought out, on one occasion, 5,000–6,000 protesters against a perceived Flemish encroachment on Belgian affairs; indeed, *wallon* in the names of these associations (many of which were founded in Flanders-located cities) should be read as meaning: opponents of the Flemish movement, Belgians loyal to the Francophone nature of the Belgian state (Delforge 2001; Kesteloot 1998). The same holds for La Ruche Wallonne in 1883, the Société de Propagande

Wallonne in 1888, a series of Walloon congresses held annually in the years 1890–93, 1905–06 and 1912–14, and the foundation of the review *Wallonia* in 1893.

But while the run-up to the Walloon movement seems largely a response to what was perceived as Flemish political provocation, there was also a territorial and culturalist dimension to it. In this light the early Walloon movement, which positioned itself as the representative of the French-speaking cultural community of Belgium, presents an intriguing case of ethnogenesis within a modern society. The ethnic-territorial appellations *wallon* and *Wallonie* had to be coined and disseminated before Destrée could instrumentalise them in his manifesto of 1912.

The very word ‘Wallonia’, that shape-shifting verbal rallying point of the years 1890–1910, is a mid-nineteenth-century neologism. Its originator was the Liège author Joseph Grandgagnage, who in 1845 published a series of *Wallonnades*, humorous sketches teasingly taking issue with contemporary cultural politics. The title *wallonade* may perhaps be interpreted as a *boutade*, tirade or ‘sounding off’ essay from a rustic-provincial, no-nonsense vantage point. Among the targets of Grandgagnage’s wit are contemporary authors from the Liège area, but also Jan Frans Willems (the eminent Flemish philologist and early advocate of Flemish rights in Belgium), as well as Jules Michelet (the romantic French-nationalist historian, who saw Liège as the mere outpost of a Greater France). Wedged between Flemish Willems and French Michelet, Grandgagnage takes up a feisty intermediate stance for a Francophone, no-nonsense Belgium, with *wallon* denoting a moral quality of bold, rustic-provincial frankness as much as a territory or culture.

The adjective *wallon* had been in use since the Middle Ages and originally referred to the speakers of Romance dialects within the Low Countries. After Belgian independence, *wallon* received the additional meaning of all speakers of French in Belgium wherever they lived. Around the middle of the nineteenth century and in Grandgagnage’s own ambience, the term *wallon* acquired an ethnic-territorial meaning. The context is that of the (mainly) Liège intellectuals around Mathieu Polain who had resisted Netherlandic hegemony in the years 1815–30 and who had founded the *Revue Belge* in 1830, months before the actual outbreak of secessionist hostilities in Brussels (cf. D’hulst 2008; Nachtergaele 2001). As an intellectual centre, Liège (solidly French-speaking with a substratum of the Romance *patois* called *wallon*) had a long and chequered history as capital of an independent Prince-Bishopric. Now subordinate to the newly established capital of Brussels, Liège felt the need to vindicate its regional identity within the new Belgian state.¹¹ Liège authors began to add their particular Liège-Ardenne local colour to Belgian historical culture. In 1834 the circle around the *Revue Belge* founded the Association Nationale pour l’Encouragement et le Développement de la Littérature en Belgique; and the next year, the *Revue Belge* carried Joseph Grandgagnage’s heroic-historical poem ‘Franchimont et Waterloo’. The episode of the heroic struggle of the 600 men from Franchimont to break

Charles the Bold's siege of Liège in 1468 was to be rehearsed over and over again, becoming, in the process, a veritable myth (Rottiers 1995). Significantly, treatments from the 1830s and early 1840s never use the word *wallon*, preferring instead the description *liégeois*.¹² Only after Grandgagnage's aforementioned *Wallonnades* of 1845 did an alternative ethno-territorial appellation become available, including the new geographical term *Wallonie*. That word, an absolute neologism, appears twice in Grandgagnage's text, spelled first with a single 'n' and then with a double 'nn' – indicating its unaccustomed novelty.

The rise of this term co-occurred with the galvanisation of public opinion in Belgium's Flemish-speaking northern half, following the linguistic and literary activities of authors like Jan Frans Willems, Prudens Van Duyse and, above all, the novelist Hendrik Conscience.¹³ As, in the 1840s and 1850s, Flemish/Brabant authors began to become more and more assertive and anti-Francophone about the rights of their Flemish language, we see the intellectuals and authors around the *Revue Belge* begin to rally around the anti-Flemish opposite, *wallon*, which came to serve as a new, concrete application for a distinct Francophone region and/or tradition within Belgium, including the Romance dialects spoken there. In 1850, Joseph Grandgagnage's nephew Charles Grandgagnage published a linguistic study on the dialects of the Liège region, now given the philological name *wallon*. His *Dictionnaire de la Langue Wallonne* (1850) was more than the hobby horse of a provincial amateur: the great patriarch of Romance philology, Grimm's pupil Friedrich Diez, dedicated his *Altromanische Glossare* of 1865 to Charles Grandgagnage for keeping up his productivity, and for his assertive usage of the appellation *wallon* in his essay 'De l'Origine des Wallons', published in the *Bulletin de l'Institut Archéologique Liégeois* (1852). Meanwhile, Uncle Joseph refounded the older Association Nationale pour l'Encouragement et le Développement de la Littérature en Belgique as, tellingly, the Société Liégeoise de Littérature Wallonne, together with one Nicholas Défrecheux, who published a collection of *Chansons Wallons* in 1860.

Such cultural initiatives from the realm of literature and philology paved the way for the various Walloonist associations noted earlier that became active from the 1870s onwards. The intensifying sociability under a shared 'Walloon' sense of identity also expressed itself in a burgeoning dialect theatre, which flourished during the later decades of the nineteenth centuries (Droixhe 1976; Quairiaux 2006: part 1 chapter 3, part 2 chapter 2) – a time when similar ventures had an important nation-building effect in countries like Norway, Ireland and Iceland. Grandgagnage's Société de Littérature Wallonne sponsored the dialect comedies of André Delchef (such as *Li Galant dèl Sièrvante*, [The chamber-maid's swain], 1858) and would eventually produce a nationwide classic with Édouard Remouchamps' Molière-style *Tâtî l'Pèriqué* [Walter the wig-maker] (1884). As Daniel Droixhe (1976) has pointed out, the many productions and revivals of this play mirror and intensify the growth of political Walloonism in the decades of an increasing

linguistic rivalry with the Flemish movement. Sentiments like these, in impeccable alexandrines, obtained increasing political rhetorical force:

Mîns mi, dj' so fire di m'poleûr dîre lidjwèsse!
Ossu, jamây dji n'rinoyerè l'walon!

[But me, I am proud that I can call myself Liégeois
Also, never shall I repudiate the Walloon [dialect]!]

The spread of this play as an inspirational example involved the establishment of amateur theatre companies all over Wallonia and also outside the immediate Liège area, which in turn cannot but have helped to intensify the social mobilisation of Walloon sentiment in the arena of Belgian politics. That, too, was the climate in which Destrée's letter to the king intervened.

There was, and there remained, an important culturalist side to the Walloon movement. N. Depresseux's *Les Six Cints Franchimontwès* (1895) rehearsed the well-established medieval theme, this time in Walloon, and the writings of Albert Du Bois were as important at the cultural end of the discursive field as those of Destrée were at the political end. Within Belgium, Du Bois' *Le Catéchisme du Wallon* (1903) caused furore, but nothing was more controversial than his activist novel on the Battle of Waterloo, '*Belges' ou Français*' (also 1903).¹⁴ He distributed a visionary poem, 'La Neuvième Statue' (1904), evoking the erection of a monument to Liège on the pan-French statuesque ensemble of the Place de la Concorde in Paris; a poem clamouring for the destruction of the Waterloo monument 'La Destruction du Lion de Waterloo' (1907) and a volume of nationalist poems entitled (what else?) *Les Wallons* (Paris, 1908; reprinted 1910). Du Bois tirelessly expressed a staunch sense of the Frenchness of Wallonia and espoused a Greater-French irredentism that lies at the root of modern-day *rattachisme*: the desire to see Wallonia united with France.

But even the non-*rattachiste* sections of the Walloon movement continue to evince an awareness that a regional, or national, movement cannot wholly avoid cultural terms in its self-positioning. Thus, as recently as 2009 a group of Walloonist intellectuals stated that 'Wallonia must secure all competences that relate to its symbolic image, its culture'. Their *Livre Blanc pour la Wallonie*¹⁵ was the group's third manifesto after the tellingly titled *Manifeste pour une Culture Wallonne* (1984) and *Pour une Wallonie Maîtresse de sa Culture, de son Education et de sa Recherche* (2004). A Walloon renaissance would not materialise, so they claimed, if Wallonia lacked a cultural project alongside its economic and political project. The educational package *Wallonie: Toutes les Cartes en Mains* appears to reflect similar concerns. Cultural and ethno-territorial concerns have remained a constant subtext in the discourse of the Walloon movement throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, as is evident from the Walloon authorities' self-presentation on their website (for more examples, see Van Ginderachter (2005)).

National characters, ethnotypes and the imputation of ethnic nationalism

It is remarkable how Walloon concerns with cultural identity, descent and territory have been insistently filtered out as politicians and observers in Belgium habitually tended to see the Walloon movement purely as a social and possibly regional movement; the corresponding, converse tendency was to contrast it as such with a Flemish ethnicist and separatist counterpart. In 1995, for instance, Robert Collignon, the socialist prime minister of the government of the Walloon region, obliquely linked Flemish nationalism to the civil war in Yugoslavia. He claimed that the societal project of Wallonia was not under the spell 'of a certain dark nationalism. [. . .] We only have to think about the damage that has been done by this type of ideology and, by the way, not only outside Belgium's borders' (quoted in Destatte 1999: 260).

The pattern 'Walloon-civic' vs. 'Flemish-ethnic' is worth analysing more closely against the background of two widespread rhetorical/heuristic oppositions: those between the German and French national characters, and those between ethnic and civic nationalism.

The belief in national characteristics and national characters ('ethnotypes') is one of the more ingrained cultural habits in European history (Beller and Leerssen 2007; Dyserinck and Syndram 1988; Leerssen 2000). From the early modern period (in essence, the rediscovery of Aristotle's *Poetics*), a corpus of learning sprang up that saw nations defined in their manners, customs and peculiarities and reified these as psychological predispositions motivating collective behaviour. The notion of 'national character' became the collective-psychological rationalisation to account for common-place notions and stereotypes about Spanish autocracy, French elegance, Italian subtlety, and German lack of either elegance or subtlety. Such ethnotypes were used (and unquestioningly accepted) in dramas and novels from the eighteenth century onwards and in disquisitions on public and cultural affairs, and have remained all-pervasive in our schematisation of cultural differences in national terms.

By the mid-eighteenth century, this body of prejudices hardened into a master opposition that has also dominated European thought ever since: the idea that the south of Europe, with its Romance languages, represents a continuation of a Roman-imperial tradition (as evinced by the perceived preponderance of Catholicism and an alleged tendency to monarchical government), whereas the north with its Germanic languages represents a continuation of tribal-democratic polities (as evinced by the perceived preponderance of Protestantism and an alleged tendency to parliamentary or republican government). This myth (for such it is) derives from humanist authors, and by way of Montesquieu's *L'Esprit des Lois* (where it was aligned with the climatological-temperamental differences between a cool/cerebral north and a warm/sensual south) has been almost all-pervasive in European mentalities and discourse (Shackleton 1962; Zacharasiewicz 1977, 2010).

This is not the place to try and controvert the myth,¹⁶ merely to flag its existence. Particularly along the contact zone between French and German culture, the myth of a deep-seated, anthropological Germania–Romania opposition has taken on its most pronounced form. The terms of the opposition shifted twice in the course of the nineteenth century, but what remained constant was the sense that there was such an opposition. With the rise of romanticism (the work of Madame de Staël is usually cited as a cardinaly important turning point), the opposition became that between ‘French regularity and Cartesian/Napoleonic systematics vis-à-vis German transcendental speculation and artistic experiment’. Following the rise of a Prussian-led empire and the Franco–Prussian War, the ethno-type morphed into ‘German thoroughness in applying abstruse systems as opposed to French clarity in arranging matters on the surface’.¹⁷ By the late nineteenth century, this quasi-anthropological German–French, Germanic–Romance polarity was dominated by the ingrained formula that French society is convivial and its culture tends to be concrete and rational, whereas German society is hierarchical and its culture is abstract and speculative or idealistic.¹⁸ The German *Geist* is alleged to invoke transcendental essences; its Gallic counterpart, *esprit*, is characterised by tendency towards Cartesian *clarté*. One leads to the ponderous depths of *Kultur*, the other to the superficial niceties of *civilisation*.

These ethno-types were, and still are, the verbal ammunition of mutual French–German antagonism. The history of that antagonism dominates the century from Waterloo to Verdun. A crucial spill-over into the realm of analytical discourse occurred in 1882, with Ernest Renan’s classic *Qu’est-ce Qu’une Nation?* The piece, delivered a good decade after the disaster of 1870–71 and the loss of Alsace-Lorraine, is a sustained attack against German claims on Alsace-Lorraine (which are, one after the other, shown to be deterministic, abstract and heedless of social realities) and instead advances the idea that societies belong together, not because of underlying determining factors but as a result of a popular will to solidarity fed by a shared cultural memory.

Renan never mentions the word ‘Alsace’, but his purport was lost on no-one. His voluntaristic definition of national solidarity as a non-stop referendum, a *plébiscite de tous les jours*, chimed with concrete calls to leave the appurtenance of contested regions to a popular vote of the inhabitants – which was an actual French demand concerning Alsace-Lorraine at the time. And in any case, Renan advances his social/voluntaristic model of national identity as a specifically ‘French’ one: time and again, he opposes it to what his ‘German colleagues’ have stated as an anthropological/deterministic model of ethnicity. In other words, Renan’s model of a voluntaristic and (dare we say it?) civic national identity is opposed to a deterministic and ethnicist one, and this opposition is aligned with the ethno-typical opposition between ‘French’ and ‘German’ ways of looking at things. This alignment is achieved by way of a double stratagem, one explicit, the other implicit: ethnic

determinism is explicitly ascribed to opponents identified by Renan as ‘German’,¹⁹ and the unstated issue at the implicit core of this debate is the Franco–German bone of contention, Alsace-Lorraine.

This discursive alignment (French ideas of national identity are civic-societal, German ones rely on ethnic essentialism) has had important repercussions. We see its echoes with Hans Kohn’s famous, problematic distinction between an Eastern and a Western type of nationalism: one derived from civic, Enlightenment ideals, the other from ethnic, romantic-transcendental thought; one rooted in Paris, the other in Jena. Like Renan in the 1871 aftermath, Kohn wrote under the mortgage of historical catastrophe: in his case, the Stalinist domination of Central/Eastern Europe. Much as Vienna-born Karl Popper saw a direct anti-democratic filiation from Plato to Hegel to Marx and Hitler, so too Prague-born Hans Kohn saw the USSR’s domination over its comintern client states as a baleful continuation of older Russophile pan-Slavism. Thus, in his book on pan-Slavism (1960), Kohn is at pains to vindicate the nationalism of fellow-Czech intellectuals like Palacký as ‘Western’ in its orientation, while condemning the nationalism of Slovaks like Štúr as Russian-oriented. *Mutatis mutandis*, this regional distribution of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ variants of nationalism as evinced by Renan and Kohn, is comparable to the overdetermined opposition between Flemish ethnic nationalism and Walloon civic regionalism. ‘Good’ nationalism is civic and, as the case may be, French, Czech or Walloon; ‘bad’ nationalism is ethnic and German, Slovak or Flemish.

Which brings us back to Belgium. The emergence of a Walloon movement took place at the time when Renan’s voluntaristic model of national identity was beginning to spread. Its first resonance in Belgium was a notion of Belgian-ness that crystallised in these decades. One of the most triumphant proclamations of what later would come to be called *Belgitude* was Henri Pirenne’s *History of Belgium* (1900), which saw the country’s very identity as being that of a crossroads: a concourse of mercantile, social, political and intellectual traffic straddling the Germania–Romania divide and functioning almost like a rivet holding Europe’s two ethnic halves together (Tollebeek 2010). The Renan-style, more voluntaristic and constructivist notion of a Belgian identity meant that counter-voices like those of the Flemish movement were unavoidably seen not just as ethnic essentialists (which no doubt they were, much like a good few activists in the Walloon movement) but as typically Germanic-style ethnic essentialists. The curious ‘all-Cretans-are-liars’ paradox that resulted ran something like this: ‘the difference between our ethnicity and theirs is that they believe in ethnicity’.

Conclusions: denied ethnicism

As we hope this article has demonstrated, the Walloon movement deserves further study in a European-comparative framework. Its points of interest are manifold:

1. Its primary and secondary sources have not yet been studied thoroughly outside their immediate Belgian context, where they are overshadowed by ongoing political antagonism.
2. It forms part of a more general pattern of criss-crossing identitarian fault-lines in the Low Countries, a highly complex transition zone between the French and German spheres.
3. The recent emergence of the Walloon self-appellation and movement provides us with a valuable example of ethno-genesis in a modernising, industrialised society. That in turn demonstrates that ethno-genesis need not be a primordial or pre-modern precondition for the development of a national movement; nor is ethno-genesis in mid-nineteenth-century Europe limited to areas like Estonia or Bulgaria; but its belated occurrence within a firmly institutionalised, industrialised state also demonstrates the persistent and relatively autonomous viability and agency of cultural reflection in national politics.
4. At the same time, this Walloon ethno-genesis illustrates how national self-identifications can take shape, not simply within a given cultural community as a manifestation of its pre-given ethnicity, but rather in an antagonistic process of ideological contradistinction. In this Walloon case: against, and in reaction to, the Flemish movement.
5. The discourse of the Walloon movement presents an interesting example of denied ethnicism, by which we mean the tendency to impute ethnicism to one's ethnic opponents while filtering out traces of ethnicism in one's own constituency. It is our conjecture that such denied ethnicism is present in many late-twentieth- and early twenty-first-century national movements, which display a marked tendency to present themselves as purely, respectably civic in nature.
6. Most importantly, the discourse of denied ethnicism shows that there is a great deal of interpenetration between the language in which national movements vindicate themselves and the language in which they are analysed. This interpenetration is as old as the analysis of nationalism itself – if we take Renan's *Qu'est-ce Qu'une Nation* to be its starting point (a vindication of French interests masquerading as a critical analysis of German attitudes). It is this interpenetration between the language of vindication and the language of analysis that renders the rhetoric of denied ethnicism possible ('our nationalism is civic, their nationalism is ethnic'), the Walloon one providing a good example.

While the ethnic-civic distinction in nationalism studies is subject to strenuous debate as to its analytical or typological usefulness, the case outlined here shows that it is indispensable as an important heuristic opposition. More than merely a theoretical lens fabricated by latter-day academics, it was and remains operative in the outlook and discourse of the nationally minded intellectuals and activists concerned, spilled over from their rhetoric into the conceptual toolkit of analysts, and must be taken into

account when studying the nationalist outlook and discourse whence it originated.

Notes

1 Luxembourg's union with the Dutch crown ended when the last male king, Willem III, died in 1890. He was succeeded by his daughter Wilhelmina on the Dutch throne and by a distant male relative (from another branch of the House of Nassau) as Grand Duke of Luxembourg. In the nation-building processes of the Low Countries, the presence of Luxembourg, with its own linguistic-identitarian choices between German, French and Lëtzebuergesch, presents a highly interesting dimension in its own right (cf. Péporté et al. 2010), which is noted here only in passing.

2 Dutch and Flemish are essentially different names for one and the same language, technically known as 'Netherlandic', with at best some regional variations in the language's informal speech and its dialects.

3 The Flemish movement is documented and analysed in the *Nieuwe Encyclopedie van de Vlaamse Beweging*. Its Walloon counterpart is the *Encyclopédie du Mouvement Wallon*.

4 The case of Frisian regionalism, asserting a subsidiary but distinct cultural community within The Netherlands, can be mentioned only in passing (cf. Breuker and Janse 1997). Likewise the presence of a German-speaking population on Belgium's (historically shifting) eastern border with Germany.

5 The ontology of such an ideology-on-standby is complex. To some extent such ideas maintain currency as a 'minority opinion' among certain, more or less marginal, portions of society. To some extent they also maintain existence in the sanctuary of print; as texts from the past that, although unread and neglected, remain available for future reference or activation. Karl Popper (1979) proposed the ontological category of a 'world-3' to describe such a latent existence, alongside the two ontological worlds of patent material presence ('kickable things' like the Eiffel Tower) and purely notional abstraction (the value of π ; the idea of virtue). For the ideological importance of texts as objects of world-3, see Dyserinck (1982).

6 In the original: 'Au niveau de l'appartenance identitaire, les penseurs de l'identité wallonne, fidèles à leur anti-nationalisme proclamé, font explicitement le choix d'une identification citoyenne plutôt que nationaliste, dans laquelle la réflexion sur la citoyenneté attachée à la Wallonie permet la définition d'une identité collective expurgée de ses éléments déterministes et essentialistes.'

7 Quoted by J.-F. Potelle, Ligue Wallonne de Verviers, *Encyclopédie du Mouvement Wallon Vol. 2*: 1026–9. In the original: 'la ferme volonté qu'ont les Vervétois de défendre l'intégrité racique de la Wallonie, [...] cette bonne terre wallonne, avec ses libertés ancestrales, son caractère propre, ses qualités ethniques et son ambiance gauloise, qui font sa valeur et sa force'.

8 <http://www.wallonie.be/en/discover-wallonnia/history/a-young-region-with-a-long-history-from-57bc-to-1831/index.html> (accessed 8 March 2011).

9 Delforge (1998), comment to Carte 12. In the original: 'Dirigée par le bourgmestre wallon (1679–88), Peter de Lanoy (ancêtre de Franklin Delano Roosevelt), New York est nourrie de l'esprit de liberté transporté dans le monde par les Wallons. N'est-ce d'ailleurs pas une œuvre d'Antoine Wiertz qui inspira Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi lorsqu'il réalisa sa Miss Liberty (la statue de la liberté)?'.

10A national anthem proved harder to choose from amidst a number of candidates. Most popular Walloon songs like 'Valeureux Liégeois' and 'Pays de Charleroi' were too localist in scope. Henri Delcourt's 'Le Chant des Wallons' (1900) was officially designated the Walloon anthem in 1998 (Paul Delforge, 'Chant des Wallons', *Encyclopédie du Mouvement Wallon Vol. 1*: 255–8).

11 Understandably so, as can be inferred from the case of Sir Walter Scott's novel *Quentin Durward*. Set (partly) in medieval Liège but published in 1824, during the brief period of Greater

Netherlandic unification, Scott erroneously Dutchified Liège by ascribing to it a wholly Flemish-derived local colour, with Dutch loanwords and proper-name forms (cf. Leerssen 1992).

12 F. Thys, *Les Six Cents Franchimontois* (1837–42); Polain's own *Esquisses Historiques de l'Ancien Pays de Liège* (1842); A. Rastoul de Mongeot, *Liège et Franchimont: Héroïsme, Amour et Malheur* (1844); J. Collin de Plancy, *Le Sanglier des Ardennes* (1844).

13 Bemong (2007) has illustrated the Flemish–Walloon fission in the literary-historical frame of reference in early independent Belgium.

14 As that poem's parallels with Grandgagnage's heroic poem 'Franchimont et Waterloo' (1835) indicate, historical memories in Belgium were starting to drift as part of the political rift. Flemish (and Dutch) authors tended to celebrate Wellington/Blücher's victory, while Walloons mourned Napoleon's downfall (cf. Couvreur and Watelet 2000).

15 *Livre Blanc pour la Wallonie*, May 2009. Available at <http://www.larevuetoudi.org/fr/story/1-culture-et-citoyenneté-en-wallonie> (accessed 1 August 2010).

16 Suffice it to point out that: (1) the polarity is overdetermined and heedless of mismatches (Poland and the Republic of Ireland are Catholic, Geneva Protestant); (2) as a stereotype the schematisation invites verification, and filters out falsification by means of a 'cognitive dissonance' towards contrary examples; and (3) north and south are relative notions, and any location between Tromsø and Malta can be described at will as either south of one place or north of another. Munich and Bavaria can be stereotyped: (a) in BMW terms as German, efficient, industrialised, stylish and affluent, and as such can be contrasted with a southern counterpart (e.g. Italy), characterised in stereotypically Mediterranean terms; or else (b) in Bierkeller terms as boozy, right-wing and tightly knit, combining Lederhosen and Catholicism, and as such contrasted with a northern counterpart like mercantile, Protestant Hamburg. For more detailed and sustained critique, see Leerssen (1988).

17 Comprehensive case studies of the discursive polarity between 'grave Germans and frivolous Frenchmen' have been given by Ruth Florack (2000, 2001, 2007), based on an imagological research tradition going back to Jean-Marie Carré (1947) and most strongly represented by the Aachen School around Hugo Dyserinck (1982, 1994).

18 In this ethno-type, both thought patterns tend to be jointly characterised as being 'systematic and theory-driven' and as such opposed to an ethno-type that sees the English as being pragmatic, sensible and down-to-earth. The fact that these stereotypes will seem familiar to most readers speaks for their ubiquitous and largely unquestioned currency.

19 This is to some extent a rhetorical ploy on Renan's part. In his writings on Breton-Celtic and Jewish culture, Renan had throughout his life shown himself to be happy enough to buy into ethnic essentialism, of which only the loss of 1871 apparently cured him; other French thinkers like Hippolyte Taine (not to mention Gobineau) had demonstrated that ethnic essentialism was not the German monopoly Renan later made it out to be.

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