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Nationalist Versus Regionalist? The Flemish and Walloon Movements in *Belle Époque* Belgium

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‘The Flemish movement is nationalist, the Walloon movement regionalist.’ Until fairly recently this was the majority view within public and academic opinion when it came to describing Belgium’s sub-state movements. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, some scholars have started to question this false dichotomy and have drawn attention to the similarities between both.

This chapter will argue that a clear-cut difference between the Flemish and Walloon movements (and between their respective supporters the *flamingants* and *wallingants*) in terms of nationalism and regionalism is hard to maintain. First, both share a common Belgian nationalist origin. Consequently they derived their imagery, symbolism and discourse in large part from the same sources. Second, the Walloon’s rise to prominence from the 1880s onwards was a direct reaction to flamingant demands. Hence, it comes as no surprise that wallingants drew on similar collective mechanisms as their nemesis.

More specifically, this contribution focuses on the *belle époque* (1890–1914). Although both the Flemish and Walloon movements had older roots, it was during this period that they began to clash and that their conflict increasingly caught the public eye. This was the result of political and socio-economic shifts, among which were the extension of suffrage to the masses and the economic development of Flanders. In 1883 the right to vote in municipal and provincial elections was extended from propertied men alone to all men with a certificate of primary education. Ten years later under pressure of the socialist labour movement ‘male plural suffrage’ was introduced for all elections. This meant that all adult men could take part in elections, but heads of family and propertied citizens received one or two extra votes. Concomitantly, Flanders, which had been a rural backwater, started to develop economically. In the last two decades before the First World War coal deposits were discovered and the port of Antwerp grew

substantially. At the same time the tertiary sector expanded thanks to the gradual modernisation and bureaucratisation of the state. As a consequence a growing number of civil servants and clerks with a Flemish background were confronted with the difficulty of pursuing their career in a French language environment.¹ As a result of these developments, political parties became more attentive to the demands of voters not versed in French. The Flemish movement thus gained more leverage, increasingly antagonising the Walloon movement.

Using the Belgian case, with particular attention to the wallingants, this contribution will also address some moot issues in international historiography of regions and regionalism. It will highlight the difficulties in distinguishing regionalism from nationalism on the basis of the quest for sovereignty and the historicist, ethnocultural and territorial dimensions of its discourse. By way of conclusion it will propose an alternative characterisation of regionalism.

International historiography of regions and regionalism

Regions and regionalism were among the victims of the nationalisation of history and historiography in the nineteenth century. They were seen as a regressive reaction against or an inconsequential folkloric result of modernisation and nationalisation processes. The renewed academic interest in regions and regionalism dates from the 1990s when these phenomena were increasingly studied 'not as signs of the failure of modernisation, or as an anti-modern backlash, but as thoroughly modern phenomena in their own right'.² Scholars began to criticise the perception of modernisation and nationalisation as unilinear and ruthless behemoths devouring everything in their paths. Some started to question the narrative of top-down nationalisation and the idea of a monolithic national identity ousting all other allegiances (to region, religion, class, gender, etc.). The end of the Cold War had redirected scholarly interest, stimulated a re-questioning of the national past and showed that the Soviet Union's russification attempts had not annihilated regional and ethnic allegiances.³

Since the 1990s a whole body of literature closely scrutinising regions and regionalism has been build up. An academic consensus has developed that these phenomena arose during the nineteenth century in tandem with nations and nationalism. As Núñez elaborates in Chapter 2, it was the rise of the modern nation-state that created the 'region'. After the end of the *ancien régime*, a whole string of principalities and other territorial entities that had been relatively autonomous were realigned in the new hierarchical structure of the nation-state, to which they were subordinated. Gradually the older term 'province' gave way to 'region'. As far as 'regionalism' is concerned, a majority of scholars – like most contributors to this volume – regard the belle époque as a crucial phase in the celebration of the *Heimat*,

petite patrie, tierra ca or terruño. The term 'regionalism' itself was coined during this period⁴ and important shifts occurred. According to Storm, regionalist movements were rejuvenated by a new younger local elite that tried to reach a broader audience than before through recreational activities. While their predecessors had engaged in learned lectures and highbrow studies, the new generation used popular festivals, museums and excursions to spread their message. The local dialect was no longer solely regarded as an object of study but also as a worthwhile medium to publish in. Whereas earlier regionalists had dwelt on the distant past, the new generation focused on the vernacular culture in the present. In short, the 'new' regionalism was a democratic, anti-elitist reform movement of the modern urban middle classes who wanted to save local idiosyncrasies and fuse them with the national heritage.⁵

Other aspects of regions and regionalism are more heavily debated. According to Celia Applegate regions remain 'one of the most ambiguous of historical categories'.⁶ 'For some, regions are ethnic and cultural units; for others, economic ones or geographical ones; and for yet others, they are simply political subdivisions of the nation-state.'⁷ Certain scholars use regionalism as a near-synonym of (cultural) nationalist sub-state movements.⁸ Others apply it to the artistic countercurrent in architecture, painting and literature, a counter-movement against cosmopolitan *high culture* that glorified rural folk, traditional dress, local architecture and vernacular culture.⁹ Some authors label regionalism a decidedly urban phenomenon¹⁰, others 'an anti-urban movement'.¹¹

Obviously anyone studying regions and regionalism is confronted with a number of conceptual problems. Applegate, for one, has extensively argued that scholars should study regions in their own right, not simply as stunted or aborted nations.¹² Yet it is hard (and even undesirable) to define them independent of nations and nationalism. First of all, several scholars have correlated the evolution of regions to Miroslav Hroch's ABC model of nationalist development.¹³ Hroch describes three phases in the evolution of 'small' nations or national movements. In phase A, a group of scholars becomes interested in the folkloric, historical, literary and linguistic patrimony of their community. In phase B, a new generation of patriots campaigns in the public domain for the creation of a completely integrated social structure (including educated and business classes). If successful, the national movement enters phase C and becomes a mass movement: in all social strata of the population the nation is accepted as self-evident. Hroch cross-links the beginning of these phases to the moment the industrial and bourgeois-democratic revolutions occurred. Thus he distinguishes between four types: the integrated, belated, insurrectional and disintegrated national movement. Joep Leerssen has linked Hroch's model to the development of regionalism. He argues that some regionalist movements of the last quarter of the nineteenth century are indeed a case of arrested development. They were the

potential beginnings of a small nation that never went beyond the folkloric interest of phase A.¹⁴

Secondly, other authors have claimed that regionalism was crucial to 'banalising' the nation.¹⁵ Robert Colls for one conceives regionalism as a concrete, specific lens through which the more abstract, anonymous nation was imagined. The massification and democratisation of the nation during the nineteenth century created the need to link fellow-nationals in a new, more embracing and popular way. 'In these flatter, more egalitarian landscapes, the relationship between the national capital and the provincial "region" became the key political axis. [...] The grandeur of the capital seemed a long way from home, and, in the new nation-state, "home" was the most powerful signifier. A more authentic statement of national belonging was necessary. Where better to find it than in the regions?'¹⁶ In other words, the region gave a direct quotidian look to distant faceless processes of nation-building.

Despite the connections between regionalism/regions and nationalism/nations, it is necessary for analytical purposes to distinguish them from each other. Núñez here suggests two crucial and basic differences between nationalism and regionalism. The first is nationalism's claim to sovereignty. According to Núñez regionalists ask for decentralisation, home-rule, political autonomy or even federalism, but not for complete political self-determination in a sovereign state. Secondly, Núñez describes the discourse of regionalists as less historicist, ethnocultural and territorial than that of nationalists.

Rather than basic and absolute distinctions, Núñez' criteria reflect – to my mind – differences in kind that do not allow a clear-cut separation of nationalism and regionalism. First, the line between home-rule or federalist autonomy and independence is in many cases rather fuzzy. Leerssen, for instance, describes the options open to autonomist sub-state movements as 'ranging from mild regionalism to outright separatism'.¹⁷ Michael Hechter too acknowledges the relative difference between nationalism and regionalism. He defines the former as 'collective action designed to render the boundaries of the nation congruent with those of its *governance unit*'. This unit is not perforce an independent state, but it can also entail some kind of home rule within a federal state.¹⁸ The historiographic tradition of subsuming the different German states before the *Reichsgründung* under the heading 'regions', also highlights the difficulty of clearly distinguishing regionalism/regions from nationalism/nations. As (relatively) sovereign states they employed policies to instil loyalty in their subjects, which today would be termed 'national', if German unification had not succeeded. This hints at the problem of using finalistic, teleological terms to qualify past research objects.

As to the second feature distinguishing regionalism from nationalism – its less historicist, ethnocultural and territorial slant – Núñez himself puts

this in perspective. He states that at times regionalists worded their claims in nationalist terms and vice versa, in imitation of one another or out of sheer pragmatism. This of course raises the question how historians can determine to what degree certain discursive traits are 'authentic' rather than 'opportunistic'. What is strategy? What is deeply felt conviction? Determining this always involves a certain amount of interpretation on behalf of the historian. Consequently the answer can never be final or beyond debate. Moreover, are tensions between opportunism and authenticity and reciprocal influences not the usual state of affairs? Indeed, transfer – movements and people influencing each other's discourses and practices – occurs quite regularly.

To obfuscate matters even more, the conceptual debate (both among contemporaries and historians) is infused with a certain normative dimension. Two parallel, yet contradictory images of the relationship between nationalism and regionalism co-exist. Firstly, there is the view of regionalism as a backward movement that stood in the way of the upward, modernising sweep of the nation. In some cases this was part of a discursive strategy of national elites or official authorities to defuse the potentially divisive nature of sub-state movements. By withholding them the prestige linked to the label 'national', they were relegated to the subordinate status of mere 'regionalisms'. The way most Francophone authors (except the Québécois) use the term 'regionalism' to refer to ethno-nationalism is reminiscent of this normative dichotomy. (Incidentally, the Québécois are not the only Francophone exception to this rule. So are wallingant authors, many of whom use regionalism with a positive connotation.)

The second normative interpretation of the link between nationalism and regionalism is in effect an inversion of the first image. Regionalism is sometimes viewed as a positive and benign force, as opposed to nationalism which is divisive and aggressive. As James G. Kellas writes: 'the study of regionalism [...] intersects with the study of nationalism in a rather ambiguous way. Regionalism seems to be like nationalism, but without the much-disliked features of ethnic prejudice and secessionism.'¹⁹ This distinction goes possibly back to the *belle époque* when some intellectuals distanced their 'good', 'harmless' regionalist tendencies from the increasingly negative connotation attached to nationalism partly as a result of the Dreyfus affair. This dualism is influential to this day, even among historians, and it is highly reminiscent of the normatively charged ethnic-civic divide. According to Stefan Berger, for instance, 'only a mixture of regionalism and pan-Europeanism can prevent destructive nationalism from raising its ugly head again.'²⁰ This tradition of differentiating between a benign regionalism and a malevolent nationalism is so powerful that even separatists have appropriated it to some extent. Flemish nationalists, for instance, justify their current attack on the Belgian state with the argument that in a Europe of the regions the Belgian level has become superfluous.

The Flemish and Walloon movements in Belgian history

The 'modern' Belgian nation took shape in the late eighteenth century, when elites in the different principalities of the Southern Netherlands came together to protest against the modernisation attempts of the Habsburg emperor.²¹ After the temporary annexation by the French, between 1795 and 1814, the European powers merged Belgium with the Dutch republic in the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, a monarchy under the house of Orange. This attempt to 're-establish' the Low Countries failed when Belgium seceded in 1830. At that moment French – the standard language in Wallonia and of elites across the country – became the sole language of state. At that time more than half the population, consisting of the Flemish popular and lower middle classes, used (a Flemish dialect of) Dutch. The rise of French coincided with the economic decline of Flanders' once thriving, proto-industrial textile industry. As a result, the Flemish dialects became progressively associated with poverty and backwardness. The uneven economic development in the nineteenth century (Wallonia industrialised while Flanders remained predominantly rural) had major political repercussions. In Flanders the Church and the Catholic party retained a firm grip on society. On the other side of the language border, the liberal party and from the end of the nineteenth century socialism held sway.

Against this background the Flemish movement arose. From 1835 onwards societies were founded in all major towns in Flanders with the aim of cultivating the Flemish vernacular, literature, customs and history. These associations were reminiscent of contemporary initiatives elsewhere like the *Association bretonne* (1843), the *Selskip for Frysker Tael* (Friesland, 1844), the *Félibrige* (Occitan, 1854) and the *Jocs Florals* of Barcelona (Catalonia, 1859). The supporters of the Flemish movement hailed from the socially ambitious, but not yet franchised urban (lower) middle classes (teachers, petty civil servants and the like). In the newly founded state, their social position was threatened because it had been closely linked to their command of Dutch and the functions they had held in the United Kingdom of the Netherlands. They channelled their dissatisfaction with the lack of social power and prestige in their campaign for the recognition of Flemish culture and language.

Originally the Flemish movement was Belgian nationalist, intent on strengthening the Belgian fatherland. They believed that the country needed a healthy Flemish population to protect it against French annexation. This fear of France diminished in the last quarter of the nineteenth century after its defeat by Germany in 1871. As in many other European countries, the Belgian state initially welcomed the activity of the Flemish movement as a way of anchoring its nation-building agenda at the local and regional levels. However, the state's benevolence grew thinner as the Flemish movement politicised and actively began to seek legal intervention to protect the

vernacular. This threatened one of the cornerstones of the young state, i.e. the exclusive use of French as its official language.

The 1870s and 1880s marked the Flemish movement's shift from scholarly interest in the folkloric, historical, literary and linguistic heritage (phase A in Hroch's theory) to a political policy-wise translation of their cultural aims, i.e. the protection of vernacular speakers with linguistic legislation. In this phase B a new generation of flamingants emerged who campaigned through organisations and magazines to gain the support of their 'fellow-nationals'. Because of the (perceived) slow introduction of language laws and the (alleged) neglect of Flanders' social and economic poverty by the government, the Flemish movement's Belgian nationalist enthusiasm dwindled during the *belle époque*. In the process the movement appropriated elements of the Belgian nationalist narrative as uniquely Flemish. This appropriation was relatively easy because ever since 1830 historians had presented the medieval county of Flanders as a microcosm for the whole of Belgium, being bilingual and bicultural at heart.²²

Although flamingants' Belgian fervour subsided during the *belle époque*, the Flemish ethno-nationalist potential that did exist before 1914²³ was not sufficiently politicised to spawn a separatist form of Flemish nationalism. It was the First World War that created the conditions for the rise of separatism, i.e. the collaboration of a flamingant fringe and the (perceived) linguistic discrimination of Flemish soldiers in the Belgian army at the IJzer front. The limited 'politicisation' of the Flemish movement prior to 1914 – when compared to post-war Flemish nationalism – is evident in several ways. It proved, for instance, impossible to found a flamingant political party independent of the three major (Catholic, Liberal and Socialist) parties. Home rule was a marginal demand and the ethno-territorial link between one language, one people and one territory was not yet solidified. There was also no unanimity as to the question whether Flanders had to be bilingual Dutch-French or unilingual Dutch.

This uncertainty was reflected in the ambiguity of the term 'Flanders' itself. Flanders in its modern meaning of the northern Dutch-speaking part of Belgium is a direct offshoot of the Belgian nation-state of 1830. Prior to that date it exclusively referred to the smaller *ancien régime* county of Flanders. The foundation of the independent Belgian state in which French was the sole official language gave relevance to the idea of linguistic difference and breathed new meaning into the term. However, until well into the twentieth century both meanings existed side by side and were used interchangeably, even by flamingants.²⁴ An important pivotal moment was the emergence of 'Wallonia' in its modern incarnation as the French-speaking south of the country – a development which ran parallel to the rise of the Walloon movement.

The epithet 'Walloon movement' can be misleading to a twenty-first century observer, because until the First World War Walloon referred to all

speakers of French in Belgium regardless of where they lived. The adjective Walloon had been in use since the middle ages and originally referred to the speakers of Romance dialects within the Low Countries. After Belgian independence, Walloon received the additional meaning of all speakers of French in Belgium wherever they lived. 'Wallonia' was coined *ex nihilo* by the poet Joseph Grandgagnage in 1844. For the next three decades the term Wallonia never went beyond the circles of philologists, historians and folklorists. From the middle of the 1870s onwards, the term was popularised in the wake of the first linguistic laws. Like 'Walloon', 'Wallonia' had a double meaning: a territorial one referring to the south of Belgium, and a communal one embracing all speakers of French in Belgium.²⁵ Only after the First World War, Walloon and Wallonia were increasingly used to refer to the southern half of Belgium exclusively, especially after the 1930s. At that time wallingant politicians gave up their defence of Francophones in Flanders out of fear that a form of reciprocal legislation would introduce Dutch in Wallonia.

The history of the Walloon movement starts in the 1840s when Liège witnessed the birth of a literary, philological and folkloric movement interested in all things Walloon. In 1856 the iconic *Société liégeoise de Littérature wallonne* was founded. In this early philological stage, Walloon folklorists denied that there was a '*mouvement wallon*' – using that exact phrase – to distance themselves explicitly from the Flemish movement.²⁶ This desire to contrast itself with its flamingant counterpart would be a constant throughout its history.

During the early 1880s the literary movement evolved into a *mouvement de défense wallonne*, no longer refusing the epithet 'movement'. It adopted a political anti-flamingant programme, which centred on the defence of French as the only official language of Belgium, resisting the spread of Dutch in Wallonia and among the social elites of the country. Wallingants believed that recognizing Dutch would gratuitously drain the state finances, imperil national unity and result in cultural philistinism.²⁷ The first organisations taking the more political, anti-flamingant turn were new ones founded during the 1880s in Flemish towns. Until the First World War, Brussels, which at the time had a Flemish majority, boasted the highest number of wallingant circles.²⁸ Fairly soon, though, they were also established in the southern half of the country, with Liège as most important centre, while older folkloric associations also took a more political turn.

The immediate cause for the 'rebirth' of the Walloon movement were the language acts granting recognition to Dutch in the courts, secondary schools and the civil service in Flanders. The first of these had been introduced in 1873 and had caused dissatisfaction among the Walloon middle classes who saw their career prospects in Flanders threatened. As such the politicisation of the Walloon movement was a direct response to the language demands of the Flemish movement, which was seen as an obscurantist conspiracy of

Catholics to keep Flanders isolated from the secular ideals of the Enlightenment. This image was reinforced by the dual political and social-economic landscape of Belgium. Wallonia was the leading industrial region on the Continent which elected anti-clerical MPs while Flanders remained predominantly agricultural and voted for Catholic representatives. Wallingants resisted the introduction of the language acts in Wallonia because they feared the creation of so-called 'Flemish language islets' that would vote conservative. Flemish labour migrants did indeed represent a sizeable minority in the mine and steel districts of Wallonia, ranging from 5 to 12% of the total population, with local peaks of 32%, between 1880 and 1910. Overall these groups were assimilated in one or two generations.²⁹

The exact relationship between the older cultural, folkloric movement and the new politicised *wallingantism* still begs further investigation.³⁰ It is not unambiguously clear how the *mouvement de défense francophone* grew out of the older folkloric tradition. What seems clear, though, is that from the 1880s on both circuits intermingled and that the political anti-flamingant current predominated.³¹ Insofar as the cultural and political movements did not merge, the former was marginalised. The subordination of the cultural folkloric strand within the Walloon movement is evidenced by the indifference of wallingants to the demand for official protection of the Walloon dialects. Symptomatically some considered their disappearance as a deplorable though irreversible process, on a par with the dwindling of Flemish dialects which they anticipated – after which all Belgians would speak French exclusively.³²

The post-1880 Walloon movement was held together by a belief in the exclusively Latin nature of the Belgian fatherland³³ – as such it was a defence of a dominant ethnicity.³⁴ The logical corollary was an ardent Francophilia and an outspoken Germanophobia. The Flemish movement was considered to be a fifth column working for the Germans to destroy Belgium from within. Wallonia had to play its so-called historic role as the northernmost vanguard of the *Latinité/Romanité* (the community of speakers of Romance languages) against the Germanic peoples. The Francophilia was evident in commemorative ceremonies in Waterloo, where a monument (the *aigle blessé*, the wounded eagle) was erected in 1904 to honour the Walloon soldiers of Napoleon's army.³⁵ In Jemappes, a battlefield of the French revolutionary armies in 1792, a monument was unveiled in 1911, consisting of a 16-metre high granite obelisk with a crowing rooster perched on top.³⁶ This Francophile fervour was a rather recent, but all the more powerful development partly instigated by the new international climate after the Franco-Prussian war of 1870–1871. Indeed, in its early stages the Walloon movement had displayed some anti-French fervour, fearing the annexationism of Napoleon III.³⁷ Despite its new-found Francophilia and the undeniable intellectual influence of French regionalism (Maurice Barrès and Jean Charles Brun for instance were often quoted by wallingants),³⁸

the Walloon movement clearly differed from its French, more rightwing sister movement³⁹: throughout the twentieth century, the Walloon movement would keep a decidedly anti-clerical and leftwing profile.

Shortly before the First World War the Walloon movement extended its base and radicalised. Up to 1910 it had mainly recruited within the liberal political family, but it now attracted some socialist politicians as well. It should however be noted that wallingantism remained an elitist minority concern and that it did not achieve the popular following which the Flemish movement at times mustered. The most important platforms of the Walloon movement before the First World War were its erudite circles and its congresses (from 1890 on). These were gatherings of the liberal bourgeoisie and from 1910 onwards of some high-ranking socialists. Overall estimates shortly before the First World War put the membership of the Walloon movement at somewhere between 8000 and 10,000.⁴⁰ To put this into perspective: in 1914 socialist unions had 125,000 members, and their Christian counterparts some 100,000. There was no *wallingant* politicisation of the masses or widespread support for the movement. Most scholars agree that only after the Second World War was there a short period when the Walloon movement garnered lower (middle) class support in the wake of the so-called Royal question (concerning King Leopold III's dubious wartime record) which deeply divided Belgium. Yet the underlying Francophone Belgian nationalist ideology was more widely accepted among French-speaking Belgians.

Programmatically the Walloon movement started to move beyond mere linguistic demands shortly before the First World War. Wallingants were worried about the national defence plans because in case of a war with Germany the army would retreat to Antwerp leaving the whole of Wallonia and Belgium's heavy industry unprotected. Some wallingant observers called on Walloon politicians to prevent Flanders from profiting from Walloon industrial wealth. They also stressed the demographic side to the linguistic problem. As the fertility transition was in full swing in Wallonia, but not yet in Flanders, they feared that the Walloons would be perennially outnumbered by the Flemings. Most importantly, federalist ideas surfaced in the years immediately preceding the First World War.⁴¹

Against the background of the programmatic shifts and the recruitment of socialist cadres lay the growing frustration among Walloon politicians about the Catholic grip on the national government. Between 1884 and 1914 Catholic governments were continuously in power because of the Catholic party's firm grip on Flemish society and the plural voting system that disadvantaged the Walloon industrial electorate. In 1912 liberals and socialists had expected to break the Catholic parliamentary majority, but they suffered a humiliating electoral defeat. As a result some started to demand home rule for Wallonia. These federalist notions did gain momentum but were not per se indicative of a secessionist form of Walloon nationalism

emerging. It was more a heartfelt cry for the loss of the Belgium they had known and loved. The overall majority of Walloons and even of federalist wallingants kept identifying emotionally with Belgium. To my mind, the federalist breakthrough was the paradoxical consequence of the Walloon movement's Belgian nationalist roots. Because of electoral frustration with the conservative Flemish grip on government and out of fear that Dutch would be introduced in Wallonia, several wallingants reverted to their *petite patrie*. Or rather, they projected their exclusively 'Latin' view of the Belgian fatherland on that part of the country that still corresponded to it, i.e. Wallonia.

A small fringe of the pre-war Walloon movement did actually turn separatist and even irredentist, wanting to annex Wallonia to France. These so-called '*rattachistes*' were a marginal, though vociferous group that had come to the fore after 1900. They were clearly anti-Belgian. One of their magazines *Le Coq Wallon*, for instance, wrote in 1913: 'Our true patriotism is the love of France – and the aversion of Germany! We love – it's fair and innate – our homestead be it Flanders or Wallonia, but not this vague hybrid country created between 1815 and 1831 by treaties.'⁴² Although this form of separatism was marginal, it tapped into a wider and much more popular reservoir of Francophile and Germanophobe ideas in the Walloon movement.

Walloon regionalism versus Flemish nationalism?

After this historical survey two related questions, touching the central issue of this volume, arise: can the Flemish movement be termed regional(ist), and can the Walloon movement be seen as national(ist)? In Belgian historiography the label regional(ist) has hardly ever been applied to the former, while it is the preferred denominator of the latter.

In my opinion, the only clear demarcation between both movements lies in their self-description. While nineteenth-century wallingants explicitly praised their '*petite patrie wallonne*' and called themselves '*régionalistes*', their flamingant contemporaries hardly ever referred to Flanders (in its modern meaning of the whole Dutch-speaking north of Belgium) as their '*gewest*' (region) or their '*kleine vaderland*' (*petite patrie*), nor to their movement as 'regionalist'. They did use the plural '*Vlaamsche gewesten*' (Flemish regions'), implying that Flanders was composed of several regions. This is consonant with the observation that *gewest* and *kleine vaderland* were in effect current to describe smaller territorial units than Flanders, such as the provinces, the *ancien régime* principalities and other historic regions like the 'Meetjesland', the 'Land van Waas' and the 'Kempen'. When flamingants talked about Flanders (in its modern sense), they increasingly used the terms '*volk*' (people), '*Vlaamsche vaderland*' (Flemish fatherland) and '*Vlaamsche land*' (Flemish country) as the nineteenth century progressed and ever more

so during the *belle époque*. Additionally, the Flemish movement did not claim the label 'regional'. Instead it presented itself as eminently 'national'. Well into the twentieth century this referred to Belgium as a whole, although from the end of the nineteenth century it was also used to denote the Flemish *volk* within Belgium.

Let us consider the general characteristics ascribed to regionalist movements by Núñez: they do not seek complete sovereignty and are less historicist, less ethnocultural and less territorial than nationalist movements. Viewed from this angle, the Flemish movement did have some regionalist traits. Prior to the First World War the idea of a sovereign Flemish state was almost inconceivable to most flamingants. Neither was their discourse completely territorialised. Territorial integrity and territorial sovereignty are central pillars of nationalism.⁴³ In the minds of nationalists one nation is irrevocably connected to one territory and one language. This complete syncretism did not occur in the pre-war Flemish movement. Flamingants indeed theorised about a unique connection between the Flemish soil and the Flemish people which organically grew from it. Yet, the idea of an inviolable territory and the exclusive link with one and only one language were lacking. Up to the First World War flamingants debated whether Flanders had to be bilingual or unilingual. As to Núñez' remaining two characteristics of regionalisms, they are not applicable to the Flemish movement, not even in its earliest incarnations. There is a broad scholarly consensus that the Flemish movement was historicist to the bone and that it had marked ethnocultural dimensions.

The Walloon movement has been traditionally described as regionalist both in public opinion and in academic circles. Usually it is associated with leftwing politics and civic ideals such as freedom, democracy and cosmopolitan openness, as opposed to a rightwing ethno-nationalist and authoritarian-leaning Flemish movement. Of late, Belgian scholars have started to qualify this ethnic-civic dichotomy.⁴⁴ In any case, the question relevant to this volume is the extent to which the Walloon movement was regionalist and to what degree it might be considered national(ist).

Up to the 1880s, the Walloon movement may be described as a rather typical example of regionalism (or – to confound matters even more – of Hroch's phase A). It was the privilege of educated men who studied a 'forgotten', but in effect invented region and celebrated its folkloric traditions, its dialects, its past and its landscape. With the political turn of the 1880s, however, things changed. The older cultural tradition was reshaped to serve the new political agenda of anti-flamingant wallingantism. In the process, the Walloon movement came ever closer to the discourse of its opponent, adopting historicist, ethno-cultural and territorial traits.

First of all, the competition with the Flemish movement led to an increased stress on and a reinterpretation of the past. Wallingantism acquired a distinct historicist dimension as it tried to reclaim the 'Walloon'

past from the 'Flemish' dominance in Belgian historiography. Nineteenth-century national history writers tended to concentrate on the glorious past of the county of Flanders and the duchy of Brabant. Wallingant historiography wanted to rectify this, for instance by focussing on the medieval prince-bishopric of Liège. Epic episodes from the past received a new, wallingant meaning. Ever since 1830, for instance, the Belgian revolution had been a frequent theme in popular Walloon theatre and song. Until the 1880s the focus had been on the unified rising of Flemings and Walloons against the Dutch King William, but afterwards it was presented as an exclusively Walloon rising against Dutch linguistic coercion.⁴⁵ As such it prefigured the wallingant resistance against the language demands of the Flemish movement. Other Belgian myths also received a more Walloon hue. Like its Flemish counterpart the Walloon movement heavily relied on Belgian building blocks for its symbolic construction of Wallonia. Just like Belgium, Wallonia was presented as a European battleground and a crossroads at the heart of the continent, between France and Germany. Love of freedom, that quintessentially Belgian myth, became the guiding principle through Walloon history, as evidenced by the revolution of 1830 and later the resistance against the Nazis during the Second World War.

The most striking example of historicism was the wallingant quest to don itself with the outer symbols of a nation. In 1913 the *Assemblée wallonne*, the most representative organisation of the Walloon movement, chose *le coq wallon* (the Walloon rooster) as emblem/flag (the Latin *gallus* means both rooster and Gaul), *Wallon toujours* and *Liberté* as device, and the last Sunday of September as national holiday. This last choice clearly showed its intertwining with Belgian nationalism as it commemorated one of the central events of the Belgian revolution of 1830, i.e. the expulsion of the troops of the Dutch King William I from the park of Brussels by supposedly 'Walloon' volunteers.⁴⁶ Other dates had also been considered, going back as far as 806, when the good citizens of Liège had offered refuge to the deposed German emperor.⁴⁷ Another contender had been 18 June 1316 when prince-bishop Adolphe de la Marck and representatives of the city of Liège had signed La Paix de Fexhe. A more Francophile proposition had been 6 November 1792, when the French revolutionary armies had defeated the Austrians in the Walloon village of Jemappes. A national anthem proved harder to choose because the most popular Walloon songs like *Valeureux Liégeois* and *Pays de Charleroi* had too localist a meaning. It took until 1998 when it was agreed to use *Le chant des Wallons* as national hymn.⁴⁸

The second trait the Walloon movement shared with its flamingant equivalent was its ethno-cultural discourse. Before the political turn of the 1880s, Walloon folklorists and dialectologists had highlighted the common Germanic roots of Walloons and Flemings.⁴⁹ This reflected the general consensus within Belgium at that time. The shared Germanic heritage was in fact a discursive weapon to deflect French annexationism, affirming that Belgium

was no 'Little France'. In the last third of the nineteenth century, however, this racial homogeneity discourse began to be questioned. The new consensus became that the Flemings were of Germanic and the Walloons of Celtic or Gallic stock. Wallingants appropriated this idea. They claimed that the Walloons represented a centuries-old community of Romance speakers that had guarded the frontier with the Germanic cultures since antiquity. The image of Wallonia as the vanguard of *la romanité* became a prefiguration of the Walloons' resistance against the flamingant intrusions. Wallingants regularly invoked a common Gallo-Roman descent. The Walloon Congress of 1905, for instance, tried to define the '*âme wallonne*', a transcendent Walloon spirit that had been the guiding principle of Walloon history since time immemorial.⁵⁰ This was a direct response to the idea of an '*âme belge*', one of the tenets of Belgian nationalism.

Thirdly, from the 1880s on the Walloon territory was increasingly reified as an inviolable given with sacrosanct borders. This was a consequence of the wallingant fear that the language demands of the Flemish movement would ultimately create 'Flemish language islets' in Wallonia. People and territory became seamlessly connected. The poet Jules Sottiaux, for instance, claimed in 1906 that 'the territory is indeed the mirror of our soul'.⁵¹ In 1913 the Walloon League of Verviers praised 'the firm will of the Verviétos 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'.⁵²

Conclusion

Scholars have situated the difference between regional(ist) and national(ist) movements in the latter's search for sovereignty and complete independence and in its more historicist, ethnocultural and territorialised nature. Using the Belgian case, I have argued that this distinction is hard to identify in practice because both types of movement may don each other's characteristics to various degrees. The only 'hard' distinguishing factor often turns out to be their 'self-description', whether they term themselves 'national(ist)' rather than 'regional(ist)' or vice versa. As both types of movements may or may not invoke separatism, the latter term does not necessarily clarify the conceptual vagueness.

Both the Flemish and Walloon movements developed out of Belgian nationalism, rather than being *ancien régime* remnants of some older regional configuration. The Flemish movement explicitly described itself as 'national' while its Walloon counterpart chose 'regional' to label itself. To an important extent the wallingant desire to clearly distinguish itself from the flamingants inspired this self-description.

In the Belgian case the *belle époque* is indeed a significant turning point in the developments, as argued by the editors of this volume. The conflict

between the Flemish and the Walloon movements came to the fore for the first time. Up to the 1880s the Walloon movement had been a folkloric and cultural concern linked to the Walloon dialects. Afterwards it became a Francophone Belgian-nationalist protest movement against the flamingant language demands. Wallingants believed that the Flemish movement threatened the linguistic and symbolic unity of the Belgian nation. Up to the Second World War we therefore might describe Walloon regionalism as a form of 'residual' Belgian nationalism. Wallingants stressing the integrity of the Walloon territory were in fact disillusioned Belgian nationalists who fell back on Wallonia, the part of the country that still resembled their idea of an exclusively Latin Belgium.

One of the underlying reasons for the anti-flamingant turn of the Walloon movement from the 1880s on was the gradual democratisation of the vote, which politicised the language question to an unprecedented level. Flemish-speaking voters had to be wooed by the political parties. This strengthened the flamingant language programme, causing a counter-reaction among Francophone Belgian nationalists who believed that Belgium could only survive as a French-speaking country. As a result, the Walloon movement's cultural interest in folklore and dialects was channelled into a new direction. The themes and tropes of the older cultural movement were re-appropriated and redefined. The Walloon dialects, for instance, were reinterpreted as proof of the perennial Latin nature of Wallonia. The distant past was gleaned to find evidence of the resistance of Walloons against Germanic intrusions. In the process the Walloon movement not only developed a highly historicist, ethnocultural and territorialised discourse, it also clad itself in the outer trappings of a national movement (a flag, emblem, motto and holiday). Sovereignty was not a popular demand of wallingants before the First World War, but neither was it among flamingants. Scholars agree that neither seriously challenged the unity of the Belgian fatherland during the *belle époque*. What was also lacking to qualify the Flemish movement unhesitatingly as nationalist was an unequivocal link between the Flemish soil, language and people. Prior to 1914 many flamingants still believed in the bilingual (Dutch-French) nature of Flanders and they did not question Belgium's right to existence.

This all points to the difficulty of disentangling regions/regionalism from nations/nationalism. Their extremes can be clearly distinguished from one other, but there is a considerable 'grey area' where both fuse. Regardless of whether we term the Flemish and Walloon movements nationalist or regionalist, the fact remains that in Belgium – as opposed to the situation in other European countries – only two opposing language groups of roughly the same size emerged, with all the inherent potential of total antagonism. In Germany, Spain and France, all regional movements were movements of a comparatively small demographic minority. Another difference in the Belgian case is the firm leftwing grounding of the Walloon movement

(as opposed to, for instance, the more rightist French regionalisms). This was a direct result of the Belgian political landscape that put a conservative-voting Flanders in opposition to a more progressive-leaning Wallonia.

Finally, with all the previous qualifications, remarks and criticisms in mind, I would like to suggest a broad characterisation of regionalism in which its relationship to nationalism is stressed. Considering that both phenomena are clearly interrelated and climaxed during the *belle époque*, we might define regionalism as the work of dissatisfied local elites that were at the margins or left out of stronger national movements or dominant nation-building efforts. As the latter had already laid a solid claim to the epithet 'national', these 'regionalists' vied for influence by emphasising their region while at the same time upholding the one and only fatherland.

Notes

1. H. Van Velthoven and E. Witte, 'Taalpolitiek en wetgeving', in R. De Schryver, et al. (eds.), *Nieuwe encyclopedie van de Vlaamse beweging* (Tielt 1998), 2994–3043.
2. M. Umbach, 'Introduction', *European Review of History* (2008), XV, 235–7.
3. S. Berger, 'A Return to the National Paradigm? National History Writing in Germany, Italy, France, and Britain from 1945 to the Present', *Journal of Modern History* (2005), LXXVII, 629–78; D. Langewiesche, 'Nation, Nationalismus, Nationalstaat: Forschungsstand und Forschungsperspektiven', *Neue Politische Literatur* (1995), XL, 190–236.
4. A.-M. Thiesse, 'L'invention du regionalisme à la Belle Epoque', *Le mouvement social* (1992), 160, 11–32.
5. E. Storm, 'Regionalism and High Culture: The Case of Painting, 1890–1914', in L. Van Santvoort, J. De Maeyer, and T. Verschaffel (eds.), *Sources of Regionalism in the Nineteenth Century: Architecture, Art and Literature* (Leuven 2008), 160–81.
6. C. Applegate 'A Europe of Regions: Reflections on the Historiography of Sub-National Places in Modern Times', *American Historical Review* (1999), CIV, 1182.
7. *Ibid.*, 1158.
8. Umbach, 'Introduction', 239.
9. L. Van Santvoort, J. De Maeyer, and T. Verschaffel, 'Introduction', in L. Van Santvoort, J. De Maeyer, and T. Verschaffel (eds.), *Sources of Regionalism* (Leuven 2008), 7–15.
10. Storm, 'Regionalism and High Culture', 161–2.
11. Van Santvoort, De Maeyer, and Verschaffel, 'Introduction', 12.
12. Applegate, 'A Europe of Regions', 1171.
13. M. Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups Among the Smaller European Nations* (1985; Cambridge 2000).
14. J. Leerssen, *The Cultivation of Culture. Towards a Definition of Romantic Nationalism in Europe* (Amsterdam 2005), 13.
15. For the concept of 'banalisation' see M. Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London 1995).
16. R. Colls, 'Architecture and Regional Identity', in L. Van Santvoort, J. De Maeyer, and T. Verschaffel (eds.), *Sources of Regionalism* (Leuven 2008), 22–3.
17. J. Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe. A Cultural History* (Amsterdam 2006), 136.

18. M. Hechter, *Containing Nationalism* (Oxford and New York 2000), 7 (my emphasis). Hechter, however contradicts himself when he defines regionalism as 'collective action designed to change the existing balance of rights and resources between the centre and the authorities or citizens of a given region. When such centre-periphery bargaining occurs without a demand for peripheral sovereignty, then it too fails to qualify as a type of nationalism'. Hechter, *Containing Nationalism*, 9.
19. Kellas quoted by Applegate 'A Europe of Regions', 1165.
20. S. Berger, 'Historians and Nation-Building in Germany after Reunification', *Past & Present* (1995), CXLVIII, 219.
21. On Belgium's so-called 'nationalities' problem' in the long nineteenth century see K. Deprez and L. Vos (eds.), *Nationalism in Belgium: Shifting Identities, 1780–1995* (Basingstoke 1998); S. Dubois, *L'invention de la Belgique. Genèse d'un État-Nation* (Bruxelles 2005); J. Koll, *Die belgische Nation: Patriotismus und Nationalbewusstsein in den Südlischen Niederlanden im späten 18. Jahrhundert* (Münster 2003); J. Stengers and E. Gubin, *Le grand siècle de la nationalité belge: de 1830 à 1918. Histoire du sentiment national en Belgique des origines à 1918. Tome 2* (Bruxelles 2002); L. Wils, *Van Clovis tot Di Rupo: de lange weg van de naties in de Lage Landen* (1992; Leuven 2005); E. Witte, J.-P. Nandrin, E. Gubine, and G. Deneckere, *Nouvelle histoire de Belgique. Volume 1, 1830–1905* (Bruxelles 2005).
22. J. Tollebeek, 'Enthousiasme en evidentie. De negentiende-eeuwse Belgisch-nationale geschiedschrijving', in J. Tollebeek (ed.) *De ijkmeesters. Opstellen over de geschiedschrijving in Nederland en België* (Amsterdam 1994), 57–74.
23. M. Beyen, 'Een uitdijend verhaal. De historiografie van de Vlaamse beweging, 1995–2005', *Proceedings of the Symposium on the Historiography of the Flemish Movement and of Other National Movements in Europe. Bijzonder nummer van Wetenschappelijke Tijdingen* (2005), LXIV, 18–34; G. H. Nörtemann, *Im Spiegelkabinett der Historie: der Mythos der Schlacht von Kortrijk und die Erfindung Flanderns im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin 2002); M. Van Ginderachter, *Het rode vaderland. De vergeten geschiedenis van de communautaire spanningen in het Belgische socialisme voor WO I* (Tielt/Gent 2005).
24. R. De Schryver, 'Geschiedenis van Vlaanderen', in R. De Schryver, et al. (eds.), *Nieuwe encyclopedie van de Vlaamse beweging* (Tielt 1998), 18–34; M. Gysseling, 'Vlaanderen: Etymologie en betekenis-evolutie', in *Ibid.*, 3495–6.
25. J.-P. Hiernaux, 'Wallonie (histoire du mot)', *Encyclopédie du Mouvement wallon* (Charleroi 2001) III.
26. See for instance *Bulletin de la Société liégeoise de littérature wallonne*, (1857), I, 20, *Bulletin de la Société liégeoise de littérature wallonne* (1859), III, 20.
27. J. Lothe, 'Les débuts du mouvement wallon', in H. Hasquin (ed.), *La Wallonie, le pays et les hommes: histoire, économies, sociétés. dl. 2* (Bruxelles 1976), 191–210.
28. C. Kesteloot, *Au nom de la Wallonie et de Bruxelles français: les origines du FDF* (Bruxelles 2004), 13.
29. Y. Quairiaux, *L'image du Flamand en Wallonie (1830–1914). Essai d'analyse sociale et politique* (Bruxelles 2006), 126–7.
30. Most studies either concentrate on the political or on the cultural movement. For the former approach see Kesteloot, *Au nom de la Wallonie*. For the latter: A. Pirotte, *L'apport des courants régionalistes et dialectaux au mouvement wallon naissant. Une enquête dans les publications d'action wallonne de 1890 à 1914* (Louvain 1997).
31. C. Kesteloot, 'Waalse beweging', in R. De Schryver, et al. (eds.), *Nieuwe encyclopedie van de Vlaamse beweging* (Tielt 1998), I, 3636.

32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., 3635.
34. E. Kaufmann and O. Zimmer, “Dominant Ethnicity” and the “Ethnic-Civic” Dichotomy in the Work of A. D. Smith’, in M. M. Guibernau and J. Hutchinson (eds.), *History and National Destiny. Ethnosymbolism and Its Critics* (Oxford 2004), 63–78.
35. S. Jaminon, ‘Waterloo’, *Encyclopédie du Mouvement wallon*, III, 1663–6.
36. A. Collignon and P. Delforge, ‘Jemappes’, *Encyclopédie du Mouvement wallon*, II, 868–70.
37. Quairiaux, *L’image du Flamand en Wallonie*, 16.
38. A. Pirotte, ‘Une identité paysagère? Les opinions de la mouvance militante wallonne au premier quart du XXe siècle’, in L. Courtois and J. Pirotte (eds.), *Entre toponymie et utopie: les lieux de la mémoire wallonne* (Louvain-la-Neuve 1999), 103–20.
39. N. J. G. Wright, *The Regionalist Movement in France, 1890–1914: Jean Charles-Brun and French Political Thought* (Oxford 2003), 11.
40. Kesteloot, *Au nom de la Wallonie*, 17.
41. Ibid., 27.
42. Gallus, ‘Pas d’équivoque’, *Le coq wallon* (1913) I, 6, 2–3 [all translations from French are the author’s].
43. Compare P. Hall, *The Social Construction of Nationalism: The Example of Sweden* (Lund 1998), 125; P. Sahlins, ‘National Frontiers Revisited: France’s Boundaries Since the Seventeenth Century’, *American Historical Review* (1990), 95, 1423–51.
44. Stengers and Gubin, *Le grand siècle de la nationalité belge*, 142; M. Van Ginderachter ‘L’introuvable opposition entre le régionalisme citoyen wallon et le nationalisme ethnique flamand. À propos de l’Encyclopédie du mouvement wallon’, *Cahiers d’histoire du temps présent* (2004), 13–14, 67–96.
45. Quairiaux, *L’image du Flamand en Wallonie*, 81–2, 107–8.
46. P. Carlier, ‘La Wallonie à la recherche d’une fête nationale’, *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire* (1990), XCVIII, 902–21.
47. P. Delforge, ‘Fêtes de la Wallonie’, *Encyclopédie du Mouvement wallon*, II, 627–32.
48. P. Delforge, ‘Chant des Wallons’, *Encyclopédie du Mouvement wallon*, I, 255–8.
49. M. Beyen, ‘Eine lateinische Vorhut mit germanischen Zügen. Wallonische und deutsche Gelehrte über die germanische Komponente in der wallonischen Geschichte und Kultur’, in B. Dietz, H. Gabel, and U. Tiedau (eds.), *Griff nach dem Westen. Die “Westforschung” der völkisch-nationalen Wissenschaften zum nordwesteuropäischen Raum (1919–1960)* (Münster 2003), I, 351–81.
50. Lothe, ‘Les débuts du mouvement wallon’, 196.
51. Quoted by Pirotte, ‘Une identité paysagère?’, 118.
52. Quoted by J.-F. Potelle, ‘Ligue wallonne de Verviers’, *Encyclopédie du Mouvement wallon*, II, 1026–9, 1026.