

Mission

On a worldwide scale, minority studies and the study of the minority phenomenon enjoy increasing interest and are growing to become a full-fledged research field. Minorities in Belgium have equally been subjected to increasing scrutiny from sociologists, political scientists, historians etc., and researchers are rising to the challenge of providing a complete picture of Belgium's minorities. An increasing number of studies about German speakers, the Flemish in Wallonia or even recent immigrants have been conducted. However, one research subject has remained surprisingly unexplored, as it has remained distinctively taboo: the study of francophones in the territory that constitutes today's Flemish region of Belgium.

The lack of enthusiasm for this particular research field is probably due to the break it represents with both 'corporatist' and linguistic community related paradigms prevailing in present day Belgian historiography and sociology. With regard to the 'corporatist' dimension, it is noteworthy that the French speaking in Flanders could never be associated with one single sociopolitical pillar. They are dispersed politically and do not constitute a unified electorate, which generally puts a brake on scientific interest, whereas the very complexity of the subject should constitute a stimulus for research. With regard to the linguistic dimension, the presence of the French speaking within Flemish society has largely been concealed, among others, through the establishment of the territorialist principle. Yet, the 'sociological' reality of the French speakers in Flanders defies the relevance of this principle. This challenge barely has been met by Belgian research. Moreover, outside the Brussels periphery, the subjects themselves often seem prone to self-effacement.

However, it is possible that Belgian historiography is reaching a turning point on this issue as it has on other issues such as the persecution of the Jews during WWII, the post war purging of collaborationism or the Belgian downfall in Congo. Indeed, the federalization of the Belgian State and the increasing diversity of today's Flemish society might finally allow for a thorough scientific analysis of francophones in Flanders. Such an approach would enable inhabitants of today's Flemish region, be they Dutch, French, Turkish or Berber speaking to reconsider the historical, sociological and cultural roots of their region in all its variety.

The Francophones in Flanders Research Centre (CEFF) is exclusively dedicated to the scientific and multidisciplinary analysis of the speakers of the French language from the time of their appearance in the nowadays Flemish and Brussels-Capital regions of Belgium until today in all of its expressions. For this purpose, CEFF will initiate and provide a framework for interested researchers, working together with, among others, the scientific institutions from which they originate. The Center gathers, preserves and makes available documents and objects of various nature, originating from donating associations, organizations, and individuals. CEFF also constitutes a library of reference works relating to the subject and encourages research by making such materials available and by inviting researchers to disseminate their research results through conferences, publications, displays, etc.

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