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Governing multicultural Brussels: paradoxes of a multi-level, multi-cultural, multi-national urban anomaly

Hassan Bousetta
CEDEM, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Liège, Belgium
hassan.bousetta@ulg.ac.be
Adrian Favell
School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds, UK
UK – a.favell@leeds.ac.uk
Marco Martiniello
CEDEM, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Liège, Belgium
m.martiniello@ulg.ac.be

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Abstract

Updating our earlier work on Brussels as the paradigm of a multi-level, multi-cultural, multi-national city, and in the context of Brussels's recent troubled emergence as the epicentre of violent conflict between radical political Islam and the West, this paper sets out the paradoxical intersection of national (i.e. Flemish and Francophone), non-national and ethnic minority politics in a city placed as a multi-cultural and multi-national 'urban anomaly' at the heart of linguistic struggle of the two dominant Belgian communities. Brussels is one of the three Regions of the Belgian federal model alongside Flanders and Wallonia. It is also an extraordinarily diverse and cosmopolitan city, in which a mixed language Belgian population lives alongside very high numbers of resident non-nationals, including European elites, other European immigrant workers, and immigrants from Africa and Asia. After laying out the complex distribution of power and competences within the Belgian federal structure, we explore whether these structures have worked over the years to include or exclude disadvantaged ethnic groups. To better understand these processes, we introduce our view of the multilevel governance perspective.

Keywords

Belgium, Brussels, cities, citizenship, mobilisation, multiculturalism, federalism, political Islam, geopolitics.

Introduction: Multi-level, multi-cultural, multi-national Brussels

2015 will be remembered as a year when the often overlooked and despised Belgian capital – the real Brussels behind the presence of European institutions – was thrust into the news as the epicentre of world news. A few days after the 2015 November terrorist attacks in Paris, Brussels, the home city of several attackers, was placed by Belgian security officials on the highest alert level on fears of "serious and imminent terrorist threat". The streets and neighbourhoods of one of the most nationally, ethnically and racially diverse cities in Europe were being rediscovered in media coverage as the capital of islamic extremism (Colsaet 2016). On the face of it, the fears were not misplaced. In a bloody continuation of the struggles, in March 2016, Brussels airport Zaventem, was embroiled in chaos as three young individuals carried out a bloody, indiscriminate attack on passengers in one of the waiting halls, killing 32 persons. Long misrepresented as the grey, scruffy and rather boring adopted capital of Europe, Brussels had already been noted at the turn of the 21st century as a uniquely rich laboratory of diversity and political change (Favell and Martiniello 1999; Bousetta and Swyngedouw 1999; Kesteloot 1999; Jacobs 2000). It had already begun to assert its distinctive and deeply rooted cultural heritage and dynamism, and the potential of its emerging multi-cultural and multi-lingual future (Corijn and de Lannoy 2000). Recent events underline the explosive power of this nexus, while also questioning whether a fragile progressive reading can still be drawn out of the obvious threat of collapse into permanent inter-ethnic, inter-cultural warfare. We therefore read Brussels as an 'urban anomaly', as a kind of laboratory of the future of other global cities caught between these wildly contradictory forces (as in Davis's reading of Los Angeles, 1990). These conditions pose particular issues for the question of governance addressed in this volume, viewed as we do through the bottom up lens of politics and political mobilisations, as opposed to top down views of policy making.

The presence of radical Islam in Brussels is only one part of a city with a hugely complex tapestry of cultural differences and distinctions, overlain on to a multi-level and multi-national political space that gives Brussels its uniquely complex identity. As we will show, the breakdown in civility at one of the cutting edges of geopolitical conflict between Islam and the West (as, at least, it is interpreted by millenarian commentators in the Huntington mode, Huntington 1997), is accompanied by extraordinarily creative and progressive multi-cultural agendas imagining alternate futures for a pluralist and tolerant European future.

Yet, while all this proactive cultural policy is taking shape, a less happy story has continued to play out over the socio-economic disadvantaged position of the most recently arrived immigrant groups, and especially those with a Muslim background. This has gone hand in hand with increasing politicisation and tension around the question of Islam and Muslim demands in the public sphere. The shape of these political tensions is archetypal of Belgian politics, poised as it has been for decades between an uneasy consociational compromise and the threat of national linguistic scission, with Brussels the unresolved territorial and power dilemma at the heart of it. During the late 90s and early 2000s, the policy-debate around the extension of voting rights to foreign residents had, in particular, already been illustrative of the multi-level complexities offered by the Belgian political system (Jacobs 1998). This scenario has deepened over the years.

As it brings in many different levels of political action and interaction, Belgium's politics combines instrumental considerations of political strategy and positioning, with more profound ones about the formation and maintenance of ethnic and national identities and

allegiance. This also illustrates well the fact that, what can be called 'multi-level governance', as explored in this volume and in the recent literature in migration studies (Hepburn and Zapata-Barrero 2014; Caponio and Correa-Jones 2017) has long been the norm in Belgium: where politics gets played out, twisted and sometimes resolved across a complicated series of arenas and channels, located simultaneously at supra-national, federal, regional, provincial, city and communal level (Barker 2015).

In this paper, we hope to illustrate some of these paradoxes in the politics of multi-level governance in Brussels, as they are manifested through the question of the incorporation of immigrants and their children in the Brussels city-region. After a brief introduction to the salient political and social facts about Brussels, and a discussion of the application of theories of multi-level governance and post-national citizenship to the Brussels case, we will go on to explore various dimensions of immigration-related politics in the city. What we are most interested in, is raising empirical questions concerning the place of disadvantaged groups in a fragmenting, multi-level political system. We would suggest that asking these questions in the context of debates about the potentialities and pitfalls of multi-level governance, might point research on transnational communities and multicultural cities towards issues that should be at the heart of reflections on the institutionalisation of non-traditional, unconventional non-state political forms and activities in urban contexts. We argue that while the emergence of unconventional political channels and arenas may indeed help these groups get some access and voice in the political process – particularly when they are able to capitalise on crisis-situation cleavages, and build coalitions and *ad hoc* alliances with dominant political groups – the institutionalisation of these new forms of political action may over time also lead to more serious pathological inequalities and exclusions.

Brussels: geography, politics and society

Any discussion on multi-level governance in a multicultural context should first be informed by an understanding of the demographic and geographical context of this complexity. The city of Brussels has over 1.1 million inhabitants, 34% of which are non-national residents (see figures below). In the constitutional structure of the new federal Belgium established after the six State reforms (1970, 1980, 1988-1989, 1993, 2001, and 2013), language use by civil servants and politicians is regulated by a series of complex linguistic laws. It is therefore no surprise that when the Brussels Region was created in 1989 after Flanders and Wallonia were already in existence, it was officially established as a bilingual territory (Article 4 of the Constitution) composed of 19 autonomous municipalities (also bilingual). Institutionally, Brussels is formally a "Region-city" (Brussels Capital Region) which is placed on a par with the unilingual Regions of Flanders and Wallonia (Hooghe 1991). It also has its own relations with supra-national organisations such as the EU in policy areas where it has devoluted competences (Hooghe 1995).The very existence of an independent Brussels city-region had been heavily questioned in the past and it remains so to a certain extent by those who would prefer a cooperative management by the two dominant players of Belgium's federalism: Flanders and Wallonia. Nevertheless, Brussels has enjoyed since 1989 its own government and parliament which has exclusive competences over a broad range of issues linked to the economy, urban planning, mobility, education, for example. After 2014, it has further increased its autonomy by receiving new competencies and new financial means. In 2016, the budget of the Brussels Capital Region in fact amounted to 4 billion Euros.

In the constitutional arrangement, there is a complicated distribution of competencies across the different political levels and arenas, which is made further unclear by the fact that there is an asymmetrical match of territory and competencies over certain questions. The Flemish speaking population in Brussels is considered part of the Flemish subnational community, and the region locates its headquarters in the capital – despite Brussels not being part of the Flemish region. The French speaking *Bruxellois* meanwhile, are quite distinct from the Walloon subnational community, and Walloon and Brussels powers and competencies thus do not overlap. This has important consequences in areas of policy such as education which fall under the remit of the community not regional powers.

The city was historically Flemish, but is nowadays dominantly Francophone, with an officially estimated ratio (among resident Belgian citizens; the proportion may be different for non-nationals) of about 10:1 French speaking to Flemish (see Lambert and Lohle-Tart 2010). The actual population of each is unclear and controversial, as is any denomination by language; all linguistic census taking was discontinued in the 1960s because of its explosive consequences for political struggle in the city. The best guide seems to be the numbers of votes cast in elections, where voters choose between separate linguistically-divided lists of candidates. In the 2014 regional elections, Flemish voters accounted for 11.5% of the vote.
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Population Figures 2015 (Brussels-Capital Region)

	2015
Belgians	776,447 66.08%
Non-nationals total	398,726 33,92%
Total population	1,175,173 100%

Source: UNIA
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The status and future of Brussels has always been an issue at the heart of Belgian politics. Geographically, the city is entirely located in Flanders, and yet has always been ruled by a French speaking elite. Over the years, it has increased its autonomy from the rest of the country, in economic, political and linguistic terms. The creeping *verfransing* (Frenchification) of the city is a constant source of anger to Flemish leaders, who control the surrounding suburbs of the city, and which have all strengthened their unilingual public administration. Meanwhile, Brussels' economic success relative to Wallonia, its federal autonomy, and the emergence in the course of the last two decades of a distinct identity of *Bruxellois* apart from *Wallons*, has given its French speaking population a different set of political priorities to their cousins to the south. It should be pointed out as a caveat that the economic situation of Brussels is rather ambiguous in this respect. On the whole, the Brussels Region is one of the wealthiest regions of the European Union in terms of output production (Vandermotten 2014). On the other hand the number of poor living there rates very high as a third of the city's population lives under the poverty thresholds (Observatoire de la Santé et du Social de Bruxelles-Capitale 2015). The explosive nature of the Brussels question has put

it at the heart of nearly all regionalisation and federalisation negotiations of the past. One of the major achievements of the sixth institutional reform (2013) was to succeed in coming up with a legal and financial arrangement which, for a time at least, put Brussels more off than on the political agenda.

One of the central problems about Brussels has also been its steady urban expansion, both internally and into its periphery areas. Officially the bounds of the city have been set at the borders of the 19 municipalities that make up the city, but its spreading influence has caused the periphery area to be a flashpoint of Francophone-Flemish conflicts and negotiations. The most heated tensions over the ethno-cultural divide have come in municipalities with a special linguistic status in the periphery of Brussels, where a majority or a large minority of French-speaking population finds itself under Flemish administration, and is able to mobilise the linguistically separate political parties and media around this single burning issue. The sixth State reform (2012-2014) has relieved these tensions for the time being. By splitting up the old electoral and judicial districts crossing the boundaries of Brussels onto the Flemish unilingual region of Halle and Vilvoorde, a solution was eventually found to this long lasting controversy (Blero 2015). At the same time, other conflicting points were addressed through a complex set of measures of minority protection for French-speakers living in the Flemish periphery of Brussels. Some of the adjacent periphery municipalities have to provide special linguistic facilities for their French residents, given that they are officially part of Flanders. The bargaining issue of potentially withdrawing these linguistic allowances had always been a key point in negotiations, and the sixth state reform did not cancel but consolidated them.

The solution in the Brussels Region itself has been to institutionalise bilingualism at all levels, and to reproduce throughout political and administrative institutions a formalised list-based joint representation, in which the Flemish are usually lightly over-represented. To make it clearer, bilingualism means that the state institutions are obliged to address the citizens either in French or in Flemish. It does not mean that the civil servants are fluent in both languages. The main ruling body of the city is the Brussels Parliament, which has 89 members (currently 72 French members and 17 Flemish). In addition special rules ensure that no decisions can be made which override the wishes of the minority, and there is an official ‘alarm bell’ system that can indefinitely stop any decision which the minority deems to be unacceptable to their interests. This pushes representatives to seek a high level of consensus in all initial bargaining. Within the city, the 19 individual communes each then have their own administrative status and powers; each indeed has its own distinct identity, built around having their own mayor, city council, administration, police force, schools, etc.

Finally, the high number of non-national and immigrant residents give Brussels a distinct, international and globalised feel of its own, that only extends and deepens the impact that the location of the main European Union institutions here has had on the city (Favell 1998; Corijn et al. 2009). The 66% national Belgian population are thus joined ever more visibly by its large minority of foreign residents, made up of a EU-centred pan-European elite, NATO personnel, multinational elite working for transnational corporations, and very sizable numbers of immigrant Italians, Spanish, Turkish, Moroccans and Congolese, most of whom came originally either as part of state-sponsored guest worker programmes or as part of Belgian post-colonial arrangements, over a number of decades. The share of foreign residents in the total population of Brussels is three times higher than in the country and recent flows of asylum seekers, family migrants and illegal immigrants have increased the multicultural character of Brussels further. About 170 nationalities are today represented in the Brussels region. This has led to certain neighbourhoods of some municipalities becoming majority

non-national resident, especially given the strong concentration of both EU elites and immigrant minorities in particular areas of the city. Turks and Moroccans have long been overrepresented in the populations of the old north and south west industrial belt adjacent to the city centre: the communes of Saint-Josse, Schaarbeek, Koekelberg, Molenbeek and Eastern parts of Anderlecht. There is a strong pocket of Congolese in Ixelles, alongside the EU elite who also move out East into the suburbs beyond the EU centred area around Schuman into Etterbeek and Woluwe Saint-Pierre. Other parts of the city remain often exclusively white and Belgian, and lack contact with the culturally diverse part of the population.

Conceptualising multi-level governance: the questions raised

To better understand national and ethnic politics in Brussels – as both a distinct administrative region of Belgium, and the putative capital of the European Union – we suggest that the concept of multi-level governance can be applied to the case, and combined with other theories of ethnic mobilisation and the multicultural society. The multi-level governance approach was initially developed in the 1990s by scholars in the field of European Union studies to account for the development of new state and non-state political structures that distribute traditionally centralised powers over a range of new institutions at different levels of the polity. Typically, they are said to be non-hierarchical and essentially contested in nature, and may often lead to new forms of political representation and mobilisation (on theories of multi-level governance, see Hix 1998; Marks et al 1996; Hooghe 1998). Looked at this way, Belgian regionalist and federalist solutions to its inter-community tensions and power struggles, could be seen to have institutionalised a permanent multi-level situation in which powers and competencies are shared between the federal state and the different regional, provincial, city and communal levels (Deschouwer 1994). These distinct levels interlock and overlap in various ways, producing different kinds of access points for actors and the expression of interests, which also widen the potential forms of interest representation and aggregation, enabling new forms of non-traditional and unconventional political activity to find a place and take root (see also Veny and Jacobs 2014). A recent literature, reflected in this volume, has picked up the concept of multi-level governance as an appropriate framework for discussing the intersection of immigrant and minority mobilisations, conflicts and incorporation, nested in urban, regional, national, and macro-regional and global scales (Pierre 2011; on scales, see Brenner 2004).

Overlaid onto this situation, we find the growing influence of European Union level legal and political institutions. This combination of factors generates what is in the case of Belgium perhaps the most advanced exemplar of multi-level governance in Europe. Other features of multi-level governance are clearly apparent in the Brussels context. Political actors and interest groups in Brussels enjoy the constant incentive to search out and try different levels on which to pursue interests and claims, thus leading to a great deal of cross-level competition. In this context, informal ties and networks have a very important role, caused by the behind-closed doors nature by which many proposals are put forward and decisions get made (Hooghe, 2012). And, as Belgium's federalism is based on a combination of exclusive and shared competences, there may seem to exist an unclear hierarchy of powers; it is indeed impossible to keep different levels from spilling over, thus opening up the possibility of tensions and political activity between and across the levels, and the opening up of opportunities to other interested parties who might normally be marginalised by conventional political parties and channels.

As far as immigration politics is concerned, the important parts of debates on multi-level governance are those elements which discuss the role of outside or marginal groups, and how they use contentious politics or unconventional political activity to force a place in the political process (Tarrow 1995, 1994; Marks and MacAdam 1996; see Zapata-Barrero and Barker 2014). The multi-level governance perspective indeed rests many of its claims about the potential democratic benefits of these new modes of politics 'beyond the state': on the fact that the multi-level, non-hierarchical powers and competencies it institutes may create new kinds of opportunities for entrepreneurial marginal groups. It is suggested they may be able to achieve interest representation in these new situations, which normally would have been impossible through traditional hierarchical channels of party and government representation. In their studies of the differences between different types of campaign organisations in the new European context, such as NGOs, international protest groups, trades unions and regionalist movements, Marks and McAdam (1996) concluded that while new opportunities are certainly opened up, the differences in access to the policy field are also as important. This can be explained by different structural factors about which types of collective action and organisational forms suit best the new transnational arena, as well as the historical embeddedness of some groups in hierarchical, national-level bargaining patterns. The different resources that distinct campaign groups can call upon then in turn have implications for the capacity of groups to organise their interests in novel situations where the exact distribution of powers and competencies is not clear.

What is interesting here, is to ask what this tells about the possible institutionalisation of political action and organisational forms that fall outside of campaigning oriented towards traditional national government and party-political channels. In the social movements literature, this indeed has big historical connotations, because of the claims by these writers that liberal-democratic nation-states have built themselves – and undergone progressive reform – precisely through the motion of incorporating marginal groups contentious campaigners into the traditional political game (McAdam and al 1996). The organisation of non-orthodox or marginal interests is therefore an important litmus test of the democratic capability of a political system to listen to unrepresented and marginalised political voices. The question in the context of a multi-level system is what happens to this idea of state-building when there is no single unitary state – and hence no ordered system and hierarchy of parties and institutions, and ultimately norms or values – into which new groups might be integrated. In other words, what consequences will incorporation into a fragmented system have on the integration of these marginal groups, which will surely only be partial and incomplete? We must assume that some sort of institutionalisation of norms, routines and practices will still presumably take place; but how will this match with the desired democratic incorporation of groups envisaged in the building of the old-fashioned unitary nation-state and political system?

What might have held for the working classes, women and social movements in the past (in the classic Marshallian view, see Guiraudon 1998), may not always hold for immigrant and ethnic minority groups, who are arguably the most structurally disadvantaged group in a modern polity such as Brussels – especially given that a large part of these groups have only recently acquired formal, though incomplete, political rights and citizenship status. Belgium has slowly opened up access to citizenship for second generation and third generation immigrants, and the number of voters with an ethnic minority background has significantly increased between 1999 and 2012, during which Belgium adopted a very liberal nationality law which witnessed quite intense levels of naturalisation (Wautelet and Collienne 2014). It

was revised in a restrictive sense after thirteen years, imposing economic and linguistic integration criteria, which brought the law more into line with more selective policies in other countries (Foblets et al. 2013). For these reasons, formal political participation is therefore now a channel of empowerment which should not be neglected (this question is dealt with elsewhere; see for example Martiniello and Hily 1998a). Non-nationals, on the other hand, might be able to mobilise other resources because of their cultural or socio-economic particularities. Yet in other ways, they are unable even to mobilise directly because of their formal status, and historically have often had to have their interests represented through elite advocacy, and go-between campaigning groups, which themselves may not share the same interests as those they are representing. Political parties meanwhile may offer openings, but also seek to co-opt and use the immigrant voice for their own interests (Martiniello 1992).

Before concluding negatively on these structural factors affecting immigrants ability to mobilise and see their interest represented, a slightly different spin may also been given to the 'beyond the nation-state' hypothesis, by cross-referencing the multi-level governance approach with the new political sociology of post-national membership and citizenship, especially the early work of Yasemin Soysal (1994). In her account of the transnationalisation of immigration politics, she discusses how immigrant political action is increasingly grounded – and given legitimacy – in a wider international context, by its reference to international norms and institutions and legal powers at the transnational level. Immigrants claim social and political rights in virtue of the idea of universal personhood, not national citizenship of a particular state, and the pro-active role of institutions such as the European Union often cut out the nation-state level entirely, combining with city and regional levels to offer new political channels for these groups. This loss of national sovereignty is compounded by the increasing autonomy and freedom of transnational business and the economic sphere from government control, creating a global economic system within which immigrants are well placed to pursue transnational interests and cultural agendas that fall far outside the range of the traditional nation state context. The question that follows from this is whether in shifting and devolving such powers 'up, down and out' the state is really 'losing control' as questioned by Sassen (1995), or whether these new social and political institutions are in fact new forms of state control, in which the different levels are harnessed to enable continued state organisation of interests and powers (Guiraudon and Lahav 2000).

Our primary interest in this paper is not to show that the multi-level governance perspective applies to the Brussels situation: by itself a relatively unproblematic claim. Rather, we are interested in testing the different theoretical possibilities suggested by the opening up of new forms of political access and participation, and whether they have indeed opened new opportunities or exacerbate structural factors of exclusion. This then will allow us to broach the important normative question about the democratic merits of a such a multi-level situation: how are the interests of immigrants being organised and represented; and what are the consequences of their being forced into exploring non-conventional political forms and channels? Can these non-conventional forms take pluralist, civil, constructive forms, or will they necessarily devolve into conflict and violence? Answering these questions will also take us further to understanding the institutionalisation of new non-state forms, and whether multi-level governance may offers a new form of democratic political organisation and governance.

Paradoxes of immigration politics in Brussels

The answer to these questions will be highly ambiguous. There have been several examples of intra-community tension (i.e. Flemish vs. Francophones) in Brussels enabling and

encouraging new types of immigrant ethnic minority opportunities and political voice; but also evidence that the given institutional structure and biases reconfirm inequalities, and may have also contributed to pathological forms of political activity and expression among marginalised groups. Here, in brief, we run through four dimensions of these paradoxes.

Political participation in all its forms

Whatever the reality of unconventional poltical channels, it is still a fact that immigrants and their offspring often have a disadvantaged and very segmented access to the political arena (Swyngedouw et al 1999). While the typical older generation of industrial immigrants from Italy, Spain Morocco or Turkey have increased their participation by taking on, in large numbers, naturalisation opportunities, more recently arrived groups such as Congolese, Guineans, Brazilian or Indians have very limited political rights in the city, and are thus straightforwardly excluded from many (not all) conventional channels of participation, representation and welfare distribution. To some extent this is mitigated by the fact that a range of social rights attached to residence are available to legally resident immigrants in the city, but the basic message here is stark. A large proportion of immigrant foreigners in Belgium have not yet been naturalised (still 40% according to the monitoring implemented by the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB) and the Migration Policy Group (MPG) through MIPEX [www.mipex.eu/belgium]), despite the liberalisation of naturalisation laws in place between 1999 and 2012, and they are thus constrained in formal terms to channel what efforts they can through existing minority representatives, for example North African or Italian origin politicians in left wing parties, who have been traditionally able to make some impact on local level politics in the city.

The debate on the enfranchisement of foreign residents is a generation-old debate (Jacobs 1998). There is a compelling case for pushing further the debate. However, it would be more accurate to say that it has come to an end after it had reached a climax in 2004. Pushed in the back by the European Union, Belgium decided in 2000 to start enfranchising EU foreign residents for local and European elections in accordance with supranational European regulations. In 2004, a heated debate followed between pro-enfranchisement political parties, mainly Francophones, and Flemish parties overall very reluctant to the proposal, with a noticeable hostile position from the party of the Prime Minister. Both camps managed to reach a pragmatic agreement on a law extending local political rights to non-EU citizens under restrictive conditions. These include the following rules: that the applicant must register on the electoral roll; has the right to vote without the right to stand as candidate; needs to have five years of permanent residence; and needs to formally sign a written commitment to respect the Constitution and European Convention on Human Rights, etc.

While European non-national residents and newly naturalised Belgians have gained access to substantial political rights, the case of non-naturalised non-Europeans was resolved unsatisfactorily and there is only very little probability that the debate will come back centre-stage. The 2004 bargain as an episode marked the twilight of any public debate on the issue and pushed away the question of political rights from a focus on the conditions of access to one on the efficacy and effectiveness of political rights in the political process. Between 2000 and 2015, Belgium has organised nation-wide elections at various level of powers more than once every two years. It is in this context that observers have witnessed the increasing number of minority voters and candidates (Rea et al. 2010). Despite the institutional opening, several shortcomings were observed. During the elections of 2006, where non-European

citizens were enfranchised for the first time, as well as 2012, there was little enthusiasm among these foreign residents to register to vote (less than 15% did) (Lafleur 2013).

The politics of administration and welfare 'solidarity'

Belgian immigration policy as a set of issues, is an inherently problematic area, given that competencies over different aspects of border control, naturalisation, immigration, social welfare, education, housing and cultural policy were distributed to different levels of the polity in the federal reforms. It is clear that immigration-related concerns were not at all high on the agenda when the new federal arrangements were made, and this oversight is now beginning to make itself felt in the tensions these inconsistencies generate.

In formal terms, immigration and naturalisation policy is still one of the clear areas which remains at federal level: a statement of the Belgian state's sovereignty over the boundaries of its national jurisdiction. What this in fact means in the current European situation is of course strongly compromised by the Belgian involvement in the Schengen agreement and its central role in the building of a new European immigration regime and international policies, that were bolstered in the aftermath of the Amsterdam Treaty, which entered into force in 1999. At this level, the Belgian state has indeed seen best to devolve its responsibility over these free movement and control issues to a common supra-national level, where immigration control becomes more a matter of coordinated bureaucratic and police cooperation and the tracking of the movement of illegals and third country national (Martiniello and Rea 1999).

Most integration policies, however, fall to regional level powers; despite the fact that it is the linguistic communities which have powers and finances over cultural policy, some social policy, and education. Welfare state administration itself remains also more in the province of the regional authorities. This confusion of powers leads to very unclear outcomes (Corijn and al, 2009, Xhardez, 2016). It is in fact local commune administration and policing, for example, who hold the real practical powers over implementing residency and naturalisation requirements. This in turn may enable difference in treatment and behaviour of different Brussels communes over these questions. Some communes practiced a de facto '*refus d'inscription*' as a way of curbing or blocking immigrant registration and financial claims, although this has been challenged as illegal in the courts. The exclusion of groups with a precarious or unofficial status is here felt at its strongest. The practice of bureaucratic and police administration in the city often inscribe an informal politics of belonging, where offices and individuals may enforce their own judgements on who to admit or not (see Crowley 1999). This problem is heightened by the fact that practices can easily differ across communes and are thus often arbitrary and protected from proper scrutiny by the high level of administrative autonomy given to communes and their individual police forces. One consequence of this can be dissuading immigrants to rely on state benefits and coverage, even when they are legally entitled (Foblets et al 2004). And this itself pushes them to look to their own informal ties and social networks as a kind of alternative.

The politics of language, education and culture

There has been a long-standing difference in ideological orientation of Flemish and Walloons over the right normative model of integration of immigrants (Blommaert 1998). Historically, the Walloons have always looked more to the individualist French republican model, and the Flemish have been closer to Anglo and Dutch ideas of group-based multiculturalism (Adam, 2013). Brussels, meanwhile, seems more oriented towards a multicultural vision, an

inevitability perhaps given the large numbers of non-assimilating foreigners resident in the city. Brussels, indeed, is now an unlikely site for traditional assimilation to any unitary idea of Belgian culture; indeed, one of the hallmarks of life there is how little anyone needs to assimilate to 'Belgian-ness'. This tendency is viewed with deep suspicion by Francophones, who suspect that under the guise of multicultural Brussels – particularly the promotion of English as neutral, third language 'for all' – there is a plot afoot to reverse the French orientation of the capital.

Among cultural questions, education is especially problematic because of the costs of keeping a dual system running in Brussels, when a better solution would be to incorporate all resident foreigners and Belgians into a common bilingual structure, in which the teaching of English played a bigger role (van Parijs, 2013). The EU elites here plays a negatively destabilising role, because of their tendency to move out of the city, not to participate in any of its public institutions, and to generally go (expensively) private in education. This again only perpetuates social boundaries and linguistic divisions between different groups, who literally never have to come into contact with one another.

Culture, however, can become a powerful vector for political interests. The exclusionary tendencies of formal political practice and competences, have forced immigrants to mobilise interests in other ways, some of which have been strongly encouraged by the *ad hoc* and uncoordinated efforts of different Francophone and Flemish authorities seeking to promote positive strategies towards immigrant groups (thereby, of course, capturing the issue for their sphere of influence). Hence, immigrant groups have found themselves in a very strong position when bargaining for special cultural funding, linguistic provisions, educational allowances, and cultural support - especially from the minority Flemish side most keen to promote its contacts and image with the immigrant communities in Brussels. For example, during the last decade several initiatives (Manifesto, Aula Magna, BruXsel, Les Etats Généraux de Bruxelles) led by young cultural entrepreneurs, intellectuals and artists from both sides of the Flemish-Francophone linguistic divide have sought to work out and reinterpret this Brussels identity (Nassaux 2011). They did so by deliberately working to overcome the boundaries of the classic Belgian ideological and bureaucratic wrangling. Their common point was to assert a new public face for Brussels made up of multilingual and multicultural identities. One the distinctive outgrowths of this has also been the very high presence and role of organised Islam in Brussels (Bastenier 1998).

The new urban politics

Finally, it is essential to bring into the frame the very real fact that contentious politics in Brussels takes on violent and territorial aspects, as a direct consequence of the frustration of political efforts in almost other channels. This informal politics of urban life should come as no surprise in a city and country where politics between the Flemish and Francophones has become so furiously territorial in recent years (Sacco, 2011). In this sense, the Moroccans and Turkish are only reproducing the kinds of paying lines that they have learned from the dominant political groups in the country.

Firstly, immigrant groups have secured political power in certain communes of the city, through gaining some control over the public housing stock in particular areas where there is a strong immigrant concentration. Through such spatial concentration, and the kinds of dense networks of social cooperation and informal ties that this enables, a source of genuine local political power has built up that of course does not get registered in any official public way.

This can go so far as to pressurise local white Belgian residents out of certain areas; it builds on the religious and economic opportunities offered by the unconventional non-western forms of social and political organisation which are allowed to flourish in these pockets of the city.

The second and more dramatic symptom of this tendency, has been the political use of social disorder. These issues go back to the 1990s. Whatever was spontaneous about the famous race riots of Brussels in the summer of 1991 was certainly different second and third time round in 1997, by which time these groups had learned that a strategic political disorder can go along way in securing a fast political response from local authorities in terms of cultural and social funding and the attraction of political attention. Of course, one side of this pathological development is the ever closer involvement of policing and security forces in the civil administration of difficult 'inner city' zones, something from which the more radical militant religious and political elements draw power in binary relation. This tendency in communes such as Anderlecht has been particularly destructive of attempts of cultural and social organisations to build a path toward more constructive political and social form of integration. Once again, structural factors block the essential involvement of local actors at the conventional political level, and progressive initiatives become prey to this kind of *détournement* when they find a more conflictual strategic line is a faster way of getting what they want.

These ongoing conflicts are part of the background that led to a deterioration of social relations and tensions that created the context for an even sharper radicalisation of Muslim youth in the 2000s. The global geo-political context of conflict in the Middle East, major urban terrorist attacks in other cities, and the "war on terror" turned some of the most historically disadvantaged parts of (mostly) west central Brussels into a hotbed of recruitment for political Islam, absent of other channels of constructive social and political incorporation. The dangers of this tendency – which were by no means inevitable given the intense efforts by other social actors to build cultural associations to include alienated youth in the city – were only made worse by the arrival of the global press *en masse* after November 2015 and their superficial conclusions that it was Brussels' fragmentary nature itself that was causing the radicalisation of youth to the "Jihadi" cause.

Conclusion

Est-ce qu'on ne raconte que des histoires belges? We would strongly disagree. The Belgian case is still chronically overlooked and understudied in comparative studies of Western European politics and society. We hope at least to have sketched a case for why the Belgian case should be central to any discussions about multi-level governance, not least because of the complex and advanced state which institutional forms of dealing with this fragmentation of politics take in this country. As our account shows, the case also offers a fertile ground for asking important unasked questions about the degree to which multi-level institutional arrangements both enable and exclude groups from participation. If the underlying question is one about the democracy or representativeness of these new forms of organising political interests and incorporating minority or marginal groups in the polity, then these questions should indeed be moved to the forefront of our discussions. We argue that this vision is still relevant, but can also be underlined in terms of its futuristic potential for understanding other "anomalous" examples of complex, radically diverse global cities.

Whereas it is not difficult (indeed rather trivial) to show that the concept of multi-level governance may apply to the Belgium and Brussels cases, the conclusions from our

underlying questions about incorporation and the institutionalisation of unorthodox political activities and channels reveal characteristically mixed, double-faced results. Whereas political science approaches to multi-level governance tend to begin only with charting the interaction of given groups and interests with a particular political opportunity structure (Marks and McAdam 1996; McAdam et al 1996) – something in other words, which is already a social and cultural institutional structure, if not yet a formal political and legal one – what is interesting in the examples we have discussed is how these protean and shifting situations involving different immigrant groups in different contexts in Brussels might be said to be largely *pre-institutional* in nature. That is, they are situations in which no recognisable pattern of institutional interaction is yet established, and thereby groups are empowered to both shift their own self-definitions and their targets of coalition and cooperation; and hence situations in which we can observe the formation of the actual identities and interests of groups, as they are socialised by the political system to take up certain places in the given political order (Pizzorno 1986; Bourdieu 1980; Dobry 1986).

What is substantially different about the multi-level situation found in Belgium – to one in which groups are being incorporated into a unitary traditional national state, and its conventional channels of party political participation, law, and state governance – is that the socialisation process that goes on in a multi-level situation does not necessarily lead to the ordered integration of these groups into the polity. Immigrants, in other words, do not become citizens like everyone else. This confounds theories of incorporation rooted either in the national citizenship-centred idiom of T.H.Marshall or French republicanism, which can see no other path for the progressive mechanisms of state building, and democratic representation of marginal interests. In the multi-level situation in Belgium, however, something very different is happening. In the absence of traditional political incorporation and segmented citizenship rights, groups have redoubled their effort to find alternative means of pursuing their interests in the Belgian context. Some of these have taken civil forms, others more violent ones. Observers of Belgium and 'pluralisme à la Belge' (Martiniello 1997) have long suggested that it is a context which offers clues of Europe's fragmentary future beyond the nation-state (Favell and Martiniello 1998; van Parijs 1995). Recent events show how significant these clues may prove to be, as the complexity, conflict and (sometimes) violence linked to immigrant and cultural diversity in Europe intensifies. In this sense, the ongoing situation in Brussels is still a potential precursor of diverse and differentiated urban politics as they may well be recognised everywhere someday. In that case, the anomaly would itself become a paradigm. Shedding some of the romanticism of still dominant theories of (nation-state centred) democracy, justice and integration may be the price we have to pay to begin to understand what is really going on in "anomalous" cases such as Brussels.

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