

Ethnic Diversity in Belgium: Old and New Migration, Old and New Developments

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Introduction

Since the end of the Second World War, Belgium has switched sides in the global migration spectrum. During more than a century before the Second World War, so-called fortune seekers emigrated trying to escape economic malaise in the home country. One of the primary destinations was the U.S., where emigrants chased the American Dream. This led to the establishment of sizable Belgian communities in the U.S.¹ The rapid economic boom in Europe during the fifties and sixties transformed this situation. Emigration declined and immigration of cheap labour from first Southern European and subsequently Turkish and North-African countries took off. Belgium, and its neighbouring Western European countries alike, turned from an emigration to an immigration country. Even after the official migration stop in 1974², immigration perpetuated. Decades of immigration transformed the ethnic, socio-economic and demographic composition of Belgium dramatically. The adaptation of public policy and the Belgian society to this changed reality has been slow. The consequences of this slow adaptation are still visible today: Belgium is struggling to create an open society for its ethnic minorities and consequently, social boundaries between ethnic Belgians and (descendants of) immigrants are large. Discrimination, socio-economic deprivation and structural lack of opportunities for ethnic minorities abound. At the same time, the reality of daily life is changing again. Since the nineties, immigration is increasing again. New migrant groups from all over the world, but most notably from new EU member states, arrive in a society that struggles to incorporate its old migrant groups. The major Belgian cities are, or are on the verge

of, becoming majority-minority cities (Crul, 2013): places where ethnic Belgians make up less than half of the population. In some age groups this is already the case: among the population younger than 18 in Antwerp, people originating from migration are more numerous than ethnic Belgians (SVR, 2012). In this case, there is no longer an ethnic majority, every inhabitant belongs to an ethnic minority. Under these circumstances, the major cities, and the whole country are faced with augmenting challenges. To deal with this increased ethnic and cultural heterogeneity, socio-economic emancipation, the reduction of discrimination and ethnic boundary blurring seems to be of vital importance.

Old Migration

Although it is hard to sketch a full and clear longitudinal image of the socio-economic situation of the old labour migration populations from Turkey and North-Africa in Belgium due to a systematic lack of data (cfr. *infra*), the pieces of the puzzle which are available at the moment are far from uplifting. Socio-economic deprivation starts from an early age, when socio-economic inequality is replicated through the Belgian educational system (Jacobs & Rea, 2011; D'hondt et al., 2013). Ethnic minorities perform clearly worse on standardized mathematics and language tests compared to their ethnic Belgian peers. Ethnic minority pupils are overrepresented in vocational tracks in higher education and have higher dropout rates (Duquet et al., 2006). Cross-national research has shown that Belgium is one of the countries with the highest ethnic achievement gap (Jacobs & Rea, 2011). The whole Flemish educational system, characterized by early tracking and a system of downstreaming, is particularly detrimental to ethnic minorities (Crul et al., 2012). The transition to the labour market after secondary school is also toilsome, with longer unemployment durations prior to first employment (Neels & Stoop, 2000; Glorieux, Laurijssen & Van Dorselaer, 2009; Verhaeghe, Van der Bracht & Van de Putte, 2014). The labour market outcomes are similarly disadvantageous: unemployment is high and ethnic minorities are overrepresented in precarious jobs on the secondary labour market characterized by interim and fixed-term contracts, low wages, few mobility or training opportunities and unhealthy and monotone working conditions (Tielens, 2005; CGKR, 2013). This socio-economic deprivation is not without consequences: poverty risks are much higher for Moroccan Belgians (54%), Turkish Belgians (33%) and East-European Belgians (36%) compared to ethnic Belgians (12%) (Vranken & Dierckx, 2011).

Socio-economic deprivation and discrimination of ethnic minorities seem to go hand in hand. In addition to some highly mediatized case studies, concerning labour market, rental housing market and even visits to nightclubs, research has demon-

strated systematic discrimination in a wide spectrum of domains. Job candidates with a foreign sounding name are twice as likely to be turned down after a written application for a job than other candidates (Capéau, Eeman, Groenez & Lamberts, 2011). In search for a house or apartment, people with a foreign sounding name are turned down in one in eight telephone calls (Van der Bracht, Coenen & Van de Putte, 2014). Ethnic minority secondary school pupils also report high levels of ethnic discrimination by majority peers and teachers (D'hondt, Stevens & Van Houtte, 2013; Van Praag, 2013).

New Migration, New Developments

Against the background of socio-economic deprivation and ethnic discrimination, the last two decades have witnessed drastic changes. Clear socio-demographic and socio-economic changes took place among the traditional labour migration populations. At the same time, immigration to Belgium has increased, most notably by immigrants from Central- and Eastern European countries.

Declining Socio-economic, Marriage and Residential Segregation

Remarkable transitions take place among the traditional labour migration populations (Verhaeghe, Van der Bracht & Van de Putte, 2012). Despite socio-economic deprivation, a segment of labour migration populations has benefited from social mobility within the own ethnic enclave (Portes & Manning, 1986): self-employed small entrepreneurs, e.g. owners and operators of ethnic shops, restaurants and industries which catered initially only to the own ethnic community, have formed a new middle class among labour migration populations (Verhaeghe et al., 2012). At the same time, demographic behaviour of the labour migration groups has radically changed over the past two decades: marriages with co-ethnics in Belgium are more and more preferred over transnational marriages (Van Kerckem, Van der Bracht, Stevens et al., 2013). A decline in ethnic residential segregation has been observed as well (Verhaeghe et al., 2012). Finally, return migration of highly skilled ethnic minorities is increasing due to improved opportunities in the origin countries and perceived discrimination in Belgium (Vogt, 2010).

New Migration

In addition to a declining segregation, Belgium has witnessed the arrival of new migrants after the enlargement of the European Union in 2004 and 2007. The motives for migration, and hence the composition of the ethnic groups involved and

the migration patterns observed, are different from those of the traditional labour migration populations (Verhaeghe et al., 2012). Labour migration is certainly one of the main motives to migrate to Belgium. This is often only temporary migration, with migrants returning to the origin country once economic gains are considered sufficient. Other groups migrate in order to escape structural discrimination and stigmatization in origin countries, mostly Roma. Migration in this case is often either permanent or circular: as long as living conditions at home do not improve, migrants settle permanently or scour for a new home. These new migrants are overrepresented on the secondary labour market or are inactive. Their profile thus resembles the socio-economic profile of traditional labour migrants. The resemblance, moreover, is not only limited to the socio-economic situation, as migrants from new EU member states tend to settle in existing migrant neighbourhoods in the city (Verhaeghe et al., 2012). Given that these neighbourhoods are also neighbourhoods which are confronted with socio-economic deprivation and poverty, this ethnic residential segregation limits life opportunities for newcomers.

Directions for Future Research

One of the main topics in recent scholarly debate is the emergence of a situation termed “super-diversity” (Vertovec, 2007), which refers to an increased diversity in terms of country of origin, migration motive, migration channel, religious beliefs, language use, socio-economic position, demographic and generational profile and other relevant variables. In other words, super-diversity refers to an interplay and intersection between different forms of diversity. In light of recent evolutions in both migration patterns and socio-economic composition of Turkish and Maghreb communities, further research would do well to incorporate this notion of super-diversity and examine to what extent Belgium is evolving towards a similar situation. Does the social cohesion deteriorate and do the ethnic boundaries become brighter (Alba, 2005) when ethnic Belgians lose their numerical majority?

At the same time, however, the current state of research does suggest that super-diversity covers only a limited spectrum of the current situation for ethnic minorities. Although ethnic, linguistic, religious and socio-economic diversity has clearly increased in Belgian cities, classic patterns are still dominant. Moreover, one could argue that the situation in the sixties and seventies was already super-diverse, although less pronounced in scale and numbers. Both observations raise the challenging question of how to measure super-diversity (both qualitatively and quantitatively)?

In line with Blommaert (2013), we think that the concept of super-diversity signals more a shift in the way we have to look at things (a paradigm shift) than a

dramatic shift in reality. Therefore, future research should pay attention to not only new migrant populations (such as Roma) and migration patterns increasing in popularity (such as temporary, circular and return migration), but also to the growing diversity within migrant communities (such as ethnic enclave formation *and* suburbanization, religious secularization *and* radicalization, labour market dualization, etc.). Moreover, despite increased diversity, ethnic hierarchies are still present (Verhaeghe et al., 2012) and socio-economic disadvantages persist. Therefore, research should re-examine the socio-economic ethno-hierarchy (Tielens, 2005). Do the arrival of newcomers and the social mobility of some of the Turkish and Maghreb groups herald a new ethnic class hierarchy, in which newcomers occupy lower positions than labour migrant groups (Verhaeghe et al., 2012)? And how does ethnic residential segregation evolve with the arrival of new migrants taking the place of suburbanizing middle-class ethnic minorities?

Related to socio-economic deprivation, the barriers of discrimination and unequal chances for ethnic minorities are in need for further research as well. Previous research has predominantly focused on assessing the socio-economic deprivation among ethnic minorities and measuring the ethnic gap or on measuring the prevalence of discrimination. However, the diverse consequences of discrimination have been less focused on. Although public debate about the impact of discrimination for the socio-economic attainment of ethnic minorities is high, there is a lack of research into the extent to which discrimination contributes to socio-economic deprivation. Measuring the direct impact of labour market discrimination on job attainment, of school discrimination on educational attainment and of housing market discrimination on segregation patterns is vital for understanding socio-economic deprivation among ethnic minorities. Furthermore, a better understanding of the impact of discrimination for subjective aspects of incorporation is also important. Perceived ethnic discrimination is associated with an increased risk of developing depressive symptoms and even worse physical health (Pascoe & Richman, 2009; Missinne & Bracke, 2012). In addition, discrimination not only creates ethnic inequalities but also intensifies ethnic boundaries and segregative tendencies. Not only blatant forms of racism and discrimination but also subtle expressions of prejudice, everyday racism and othering practices, can create a feeling of non-belonging among immigrants and their descendants, which in turn shapes patterns of self-identification. Discrimination and exclusion, for example, have been identified as factors contributing to the development of *reactive identities* or *reactive ethnicity* (Rumbaut, 1994). Among second-generation Muslim migrants an increase in religious fervour and a trend towards salafism have been observed as an indirect consequence of ethnic discrimination (Roy, 2004). The multifaceted impact of discrimination and other barriers on life chances needs to be studied from the point of view of minorities them-

selves and not by assessing the gap compared to the majority population. To what extent is discrimination predictive of socio-economic deprivation and how do ethnic minorities react to this discrimination, going from physical and mental health to ethnic identity formation and religiosity?

Research among ethnic minorities has been hampered by data limitations. Governments and scholars of neighbouring countries rely on either representative censuses or specific surveys which oversample ethnic minorities to assess socio-economic attainment or other aspects of ethnic minorities. Both are scarce in Belgium. Whereas Belgium conducts censuses every ten years, accessing and using the data is difficult and expensive. Moreover, information in the census is limited to some topics relevant for public policy, such as housing and health. Other subjects, including for instance attitudes towards a range of subjects, such as perceived discrimination, religiosity or language use, are not covered in the census and censuses are only distributed in the official languages. As a result, large-scale survey-research directed at ethnic minorities, with translated questionnaires and questions covering a wide spectrum of life as an ethnic minority, is virtually absent: the last surveys date back almost twenty years.³ Information on some of the above-mentioned topics is either very fragmented or totally absent over the last two decades. This lack of data contributes to the prevailing image of a static situation among traditional labour migrant populations and virtual ignorance about the situation among new migrant groups. Further research would do well to develop its own survey research directed at specific minority groups or to analyse the data of the census thoroughly and longitudinally so as to outline evolutions among ethnic minorities.

Conclusion

Since Belgium has witnessed the transformation from emigration to immigration country, it has struggled to create an open and just society for its ethnic minorities. Although it is virtually impossible to establish a clear image of the socio-economic situation of ethnic minorities, because of both an increased diversity and a lack of data, the image is incomplete. Despite the formation of a middle class, socio-economic disadvantage prevails among the old migrant groups. New migrants from new EU member states are overrepresented on the secondary labour market or are inactive. Research into the prevalence of ethnic discrimination has demonstrated widespread discrimination in different domains of life. In light of the recent increase in diversity on the one hand and the surprisingly stable socio-economic deprivation among the traditional labour migrant groups, the challenges are numerous. The directions for further research are diverse. First of all, whether super-diversity is emerging in Belgium has not yet been thoroughly examined. Second, more attention

needs to be paid to the perpetuating socio-economic deprivation among ethnic minority groups, including both old and new migrants, and to responses to this problem such as suburbanization and return migration. Third, for a better understanding of deprivation, a thorough analysis of the diverse consequences of discrimination for ethnic minorities is needed. To attain all these goals, however, scholars will have to invest in the longitudinal analysis of census data or in conducting ethnic minority oriented survey research.

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Notes

1. The most notable manifestation was probably the publication of a Flemish newspaper since 1914: the *Detroit Gazette*. The newspaper is still published today, though English has replaced Dutch as the main language of the newspaper: <http://www.gazettevandetroit.com/>.
2. Due to the economic decline in reaction to the oil crisis in the seventies, Belgium closed its borders for labour migrants, in concordance with other Western European countries.
3. The last most comprehensive survey was the 'Migration History and social mobility', dating back to 1994-1996.