

“Allochthones” in the Netherlands and Belgium

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ABSTRACT

Schematically one can distinguish two traditions related to ethnic statistics in Europe. In France, Germany and most southern European countries, the dominant statistical categorisations merely distinguish individuals on the basis of their nationality. In contrast, most northern European countries have been producing data on the ethnic and/or foreign origin of their populations. Belgium is caught somewhere in between these two traditions. The French speaking part of Belgium tends to follow the French tradition of refusing ethnic categorisation, while the Flemish try to copy the Dutch model in distinguishing “allochthones” and “autochthones.” This contribution offers an analysis of the construction of ethnic categories as it has been undertaken in the Dutch context and (partially) imported in Belgium.

INTRODUCTION

In all European states the classification and counting of nationals and foreigners is regarded to be a legitimate endeavour. When examining migration and international mobility, nationality is often regarded to be the most appropriate criterion for distinction. In the member states of the European Union the category of “EU citizen” has become sort of an intermediary category in between the “national citizen” on the one hand and the “genuine foreigner” on the other hand. Indeed, in a growing number of policy matters, the process of Europeanisation has led to equal rights for residents from other EU member states, to which other foreigners are not necessarily entitled. As a result, in all kinds of official statistics increasingly the distinction is being made between “EU citizens” on the one hand and “third country nationals” (inhabitants who do not hold the nationality of one of the EU Member States) on the other hand.

In contrast, counting and classifying individuals on the basis of their ethnic origin is to a far lesser degree seen to be acceptable in continental Europe, while it is a standard operating procedure in the United States, Canada and Brazil. In the latter countries, interethnic relations are judged to have as much importance and relevance as gender or class relations. Official statistics routinely distinguishes races and this does not provoke large-scale criticism.

In continental Europe, ethnic classifications often have no comparable institutional or statistical translation, although they are very currently being used in day-to-day life. One could

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argue in favour of such classifications as tools to measure ethnic and racial discrimination. Moreover, targeted groups might mobilise them in order to defend their interests in policies of redistribution of social goods (jobs, housing, etc.). However, the possibility of using such categorisations to tackle discrimination apparently does not provide sufficient justification for the construction of ethnic categories in official statistics. The misfit between the vastness of the debate, particularly in France, which is triggered by the mere possibility of constructing ethnic categories in statistics (see for an overview: Spire et Merllié, 1998; Blum, 2002) on the one hand and the limited number of studies pertaining to the actual possibilities of operationalisation of ethnicity on the other hand (Bulmer, 1996; Simon, 1997, 1998; Aspinall, 2002; Lie, 2002) attests to the strong political dimension of the matter. The political passions that feed the scientific debate strongly demonstrate that the definition of statistical categories on ethnicity and race is not merely a technical matter. The construction of these categories is influenced by ideologies, visions about nations and visions about interrelations between social groups. An additional element that further complicates the debate is that they are also performative: the use of ethnic categories reinforces the ethnicisation of society. Once they are socially constructed, these categories gain their own life.

Schematically one can distinguish two traditions related to ethnic statistics in Europe. In France, Germany and most southern European countries, the dominant statistical categorisations merely distinguish individuals on the basis of their nationality. It basically boils down to a limitation to two categories: the national and the foreigner. Often an additional distinction is made among the foreign population between those coming from other EU-member states and those who don't. With the introduction of the category "immigrant population" (INSEE, 1999), France has tried to make the demographic contribution of immigration to its population visible without, however, distinguishing ethnic groups. In contrast, most northern European countries have been producing data on the ethnic and/or foreign origin of their populations. The United Kingdom has, for instance, a system of self-identification of ethnicity, while the Netherlands try to objectively count its population of foreign origin (regardless whether they hold Dutch nationality or not) on the basis of country of birth of the parents of its residents. The Dutch have adopted the category of "allochthones" to label the ethnic or foreign origin of segments of its population and can make distinctions with regard to countries of origin. This category, at first mainly statistical, has gradually become adopted in ordinary language as a particular social category with a number of specific connotations.

The underlying reasons for the differences in traditions are to be linked to diverging perspectives on the nation (*ethnos* versus *demos*) and on the way in which foreign groups should be treated (target policy or not). Due to limited space we will not address this matter in this contribution. We have tackled this issue in an earlier publication (Jacobs and Rea, 2005).

Belgium is caught somewhere in between these two traditions. The French speaking part of Belgium tends to follow the French tradition of refusing ethnic categorisation, while the Flemish (the Dutch speaking part) try to copy the Dutch model in distinguishing "allochthones" and "autochthones." In Flanders, as in the Netherlands, the term "allochthone" is widely used in academic, political and institutional circles (as in the press) to refer to immigrant-origin – mainly non-EU origin – inhabitants. This difference in conceptualisation within one and the same state has not led the federal Belgian state, which is still in charge of a lot of statistical production, to produce data on the number of "allochthones" at the national level. This contribution wants to offer an analysis of the construction of ethnic categories as it has been undertaken in the Dutch context and how the category of "allochthones" has been (partially) imported into the Belgian context, and discusses what the consequences are for research and policy making.

THE 'ALLOCHTHONOUS' POPULATION OF THE NETHERLANDS

In the course of the 1990s, significant numbers of foreigners obtained Dutch nationality through either the option procedure or the naturalisation procedure. In the Netherlands, this does not cause these persons to disappear from official figures, since they remain visible as being part of a specific group of nationals of foreign origin. In the Netherlands there is no taboo against monitoring and keeping track of foreign origin, to the extent that this has been seen to constitute a problem in countries such as France and Belgium. Statistics not only differentiate according to nationality but equally with regard to (some form of) ethnic background.

The Dutch model of ethnic statistics has two specificities. First of all, in contrast to the UK system which relies on self identification, the Dutch system uses an objective criterion: place of birth of the parents. Secondly, a generic category of "allochthones" has been created, lumping together foreigners and a large part of the nationals who have a foreign background.

Although the central terminology is still "ethnic minorities"¹ in policies targeted at foreign origin groups, the category of "allochthones" has gained importance through extensive use. The notion was introduced² in the policy domain by the report *Allochtonenbeleid* (WRR, 1989) of the academic advisory body for the government (*Wetenschappelijke Raad voor Regeringsbeleid*, in short: WRR). In this document "allochthones" were defined as:

"...Generally speaking, all persons who come from elsewhere and have durably settled in the Netherlands, including their descendants until the third generation, in as far as the latter want to consider themselves as allochthones. Minorities are allochthonous groups which find themselves in a disfavoured position: it has to be assessed periodically which groups have to be considered to be minorities" (WRR, 1989: 10).

It was also in this report that a plea was made to install a system of ethnic registration that goes further than the distinction between nationals and non-nationals. The report preferred a system of self-registration. In its reaction to the report, the Dutch government, however, stated it preferred to stick to the notion of ethnic minorities (Rijkschroeff, Duyvendak, and Pels, 2003: 37) and it did not go into the matter of ethnic registration. Although the notion of "allochthone" was starting to be routinely used in policy documents, it only got an operational basis in 1995, following the introduction of a new population administration system at the municipal level (*Gemeentelijke Basisadministratie*, GBA). It was the national statistical office, the *Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek* (CBS), which de facto defined and constructed the new category of "allochthone" in a semi-autonomous manner, using information coming from the GBA. It is their definition that would become hegemonic and is still the reference today.

Since 1999 the CBS defines allochthones as:

"Every person living in the Netherlands of which at least one of the parents was born abroad"

This definition is still valid as we write this contribution³. Note that the definition does not in itself suggest any racial or cultural connotation⁴, as the criterion is place of birth of the parents. Place of birth of the parents is used as a proxy for foreign origin. It is "imprecise" as an ethnic category in the sense that it for instance equally includes children of Dutch expatriates.

Before 1999, the CBS already used the category of "allochthone": the allochthonous population was systematically counted on the basis of municipal data since 1995⁵. However,

during the period 1995–1999, there were two definitions in use: an enlarged one and a restricted one. According to the enlarged definition, the allochthones were all persons who lived in the Netherlands and were either not born in the Netherlands or were born in the Netherlands but had at least one parent which was not born in the Netherlands. In a more limited definition, the CBS only took account of people born abroad of whom at least one parent was equally born abroad and of people who were born in the Netherlands but who had two parents born abroad. In the year 1998, the CBS had the habit of privileging the restricted definition in its publications. Due to insistence by the government, the CBS in 1999 however once again preferred to use the enlarged definition before finally opting for the new definition that is still in use.

The most recent definition of “allochthones” thus entails all people of the restricted definition, while adding all persons born in the Netherlands of whom at least one parent was not born in the Netherlands (De Valk et al., 2001). The difference with the older enlarged definition is that it no longer includes people who were born abroad out of two parents born in the Netherlands. In the 1999 annual report regarding the minorities policy, the government stipulated it preferred to keep the children from “mixed” couples in the new definition (as opposed to the old restricted definition). The argumentation was as follows:

“The mixed group is interesting because they seem to succeed better than the group of whom the two parents are born abroad.”⁶

Whatever is the precise definition and operationalisation, in all cases the category of “allochthone” is broader than the one of “foreigner”, since it also includes people who hold the Dutch nationality. With the choice for place of birth as a criterion, the CBS could still trace people with Dutch nationality that originated in the former Dutch colonies, without having to make any explicit racial distinction. As has been pinpointed before, these groups are official targets of the minorities policy.

Let us stress that the objective criterion of place of birth is combined with a generational criterion in the notion of “allochthone.” At least in the CBS definition the third generation of immigrants is in principle automatically considered to be “autochthonous” and not “allochthonous.” The statistical administrative use of the category of “allochthone” by the CBS thus differs on this point from the proposition by the WRR, which (re)launched the category in 1989. In the definition of the national statistical office, “allochthone” is restricted to refer to the first generation of immigrants (those born outside of the Netherlands) and to the second generation of people of foreign origin (born in the Netherlands but with at least one foreign parent).⁷

One of the aims of the quasi-ethnic category of “allochthone” is to be able to visualize the ethno-cultural diversity within the population, especially in the urban areas. Statistics that only rely on the criterion of nationality cannot do this in the same manner (see Table 1). Geographically the allochthones are mainly to be found in the municipalities at the borders and in the four largest cities of the country. In the year 2000, Amsterdam had 44.4 per cent allochthonous inhabitants, The Hague and Rotterdam had 40 per cent, and Utrecht almost 30 per cent.

Following its operationalisation by the national statistics office, the category of “allochthone” was increasingly used in policy documents, academia, public debate and the media. As a result, it was eventually even adopted in ordinary language. Not surprisingly, in the process, the notion of “allochthone” underwent a change of meaning and became increasingly used in ways differing substantially from its original administrative definition. It began to be widely used to pinpoint people of Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese and Antillian origin – the largest official “ethnic minorities” – and for refugees from Africa, Asia and Latin America.

TABLE 1
FOREIGN POPULATION AND ALLOCHTHONOUS POPULATION IN THE NETHERLANDS, 2001–2004
(1ST OF JANUARY)

	2001	2002	2003	2004
Total population	15 987 075	16 105 285	16 192 572	16 258 032
Foreign population	667 802	690 393	699 954	702 185
% of foreigners	4,2	4,3	4,3	4,3
Allochthonous pop.	2 870 224	2 964 949	3 038 758	3 088 152
% of allochthones	18,0	18,4	18,8	19,0
Allochthones born outside of the Netherlands	1 488 960	1 547 079	1 585 927	1 602 730
Allochthones born in the Netherlands with two parents born abroad	542 871	566 165	588 451	608 369
Allochthones born in the Netherlands with one parents born abroad	838 393	851 705	864 380	877 053

Source: *Central Bureau of Statistics*, <http://statline.cbs.nl>.

It was gradually bestowed with a connotation of the “non-white non-European Other.” Originally constructed as a mere descriptive statistical category by CBS, the diffusion of the term in ordinary speech acts led to a transformation into a racial-culturalist category. It was now targeted toward everyone who was supposed not to have a “western” origin. In its ordinary use it designated groups touched by what Balibar (1992) has called European racism, in particular descendents of stigmatised immigrant groups and immigrants from the former colonies (Rea, 1998). European immigrants and their offspring tended not to be included in the semantic field of the notion, in contrast to its official definition.

The pressure towards a racial-culturalist content was reflected in the statistical distinction which the CBS itself introduced in 1999 when distinguishing western allochthones and non-western allochthones (See Table 2).⁸ This distinction is mainly used for statistical purposes in the field of education, although it has not remained limited to that policy domain.

According to the CBS, the following groups make up the category of western Allochthones: “the allochthones of European origin (with the exception of Turkey), of North-American origin, of Oceanic origin, of Indonesian origin and of Japanese origin.” In contrast, the CBS identifies the following groups as part of the category of non-western allochthones: “people originating from Turkish, African, Latin-American and Asian immigration, except for people of Japanese and Indonesian origin.” The subdivision within the generic category of allochthones has thus more than an ethnic dimension. In the words of the national statistics office CBS, the Japanese and Indonesians have to be excluded from the category of non-western allochthones because of “their socio-economic and cultural position” (<http://statline.cbs.nl>). The classification thus links up with two stereotypical ideas about the immigrant: ethnic origin and inferior social origin. We can note that people of Indonesian origin are excluded from the category since a lot of (descendants of) Dutch colonizers “returned” to Europe after the independence of Indonesia. In the definition of non-western allochthones the “imprecision” of the proxy of country of birth of parents was thus “corrected” for a particular group of colonial expatriates (while at the same time introducing a new bias with regard to people of Indonesian origin without a genealogical link with white Dutch colonizers).

As we have already stressed, the third generation of foreign origin is automatically considered to be “autochthonous” by the definition of the CBS. The category of “allochthone” hence does not function as an eternal racial category. Nevertheless, in ordinary life this limitation of the definition of “allochthone” is not as strictly respected. Interestingly, although

TABLE 2
 'WESTERN' AND 'NON-WESTERN ALLOCHTHONES' OF THE FIRST AND SECOND GENERATION IN
 THE NETHERLANDS, 2001–2004 ACCORDING TO THE CBS

	Number of Western Allochthones	% in Total Population	Number of Non-western Allochtones	% in Total Population
2001	1 387 036	8,7	1 483 188	9,3
2002	1 406 596	8,7	1 558 353	9,7
2003	1 416 156	8,8	1 622 602	10,0
2004	1 419 855	8,8	1 668 297	10,2

Source: *Central Bureau of Statistics*, <http://statline.cbs.nl>.

the CBS scrupulously avoids the use of the term “allochthone” to designate the third generation, the national statistical office has tried to keep track of this third generation. Indeed, since 2000 the CBS has offered figures related to the “non-western third generation,” in which it classifies everyone who has at least one grandparent who was born abroad in a “non-western” country (following the earlier distinction between “western” and “non-western”). The data is produced in quite some detail, allowing to distinguish those who have respectively one, two, three or all four grandparents of non-western origin. Specific data is provided for groups of Moroccan, Turkish, Surinamese and Antillian origin. It should be noted that comparable figures are not made available for the “western third generation.”

THE IMPORT AND USE OF THE CATEGORY “ALLOCHTHONE” IN FLANDERS

In the Belgian context, the term “allochthone” for the first time appears in the report of the Royal Commissioner for Immigrant Policy (CRPI, 1989), a federal institution charged with preparing recommendations for a coherent integration policy. It had then just been (re)launched in the neighbouring Netherlands through the WRR-report “*allochtonenbeleid*.” Copied from the Dutch, the term gradually increased in popularity in Flemish academic and political circles but did not impregnate the discourse on Francophone side.

Ten years later, in the Flemish decree of 1998, the Flemish government imported the notion of “allochthone” as constructed by the Dutch CBS but modified it in three ways. First of all, the generational criterion was extended to the third generation. Secondly, the weaker socio-economic position – which inspires the Dutch category of “non-western allochthone” – became an integral element of the Flemish definition. Thirdly, the definition was bestowed with a clearer cultural dimension. The definition in the 1998 decree is as follows:

“By allochthones we understand all persons who are legally residing in Belgium and simultaneously fulfil the following conditions, whether they possess Belgian nationality or not: a) have at least one parent or grand-parents which is born outside of Belgium, b) find themselves in a disfavoured position because of their ethnic origin or their weak socio-economic position.”

While this definition has as its official purpose to clearly define the targeted groups of the Flemish integration policy, it cannot be used in the collection of official statistical data. The federal administration merely uses the distinction between Belgians and foreigners in its statistics. In this regard, one article in the law on public statistics is of particular importance.

The law stipulates that the national statistical office, *l'Institut National de Statistique* (INS), does not have the authorisation to produce any statistics relating to ethnic origin:

“In no case whatsoever can the investigations and statistical studies of the national institute for statistics be related to the private life, the political, philosophical or religious opinions or activities, race or ethnic origin.”⁹

The INS seems to follow this guideline in a strict manner and thus refrains from producing statistics on place of birth of parents and grandparents (one of the criteria of the Flemish definition of “allochthone”). In an internal note, the national statistical office INS comments on the article in the following way:

“Excluding all research into political, philosophical or religious opinions or activities, into race or ethnic origin and into sexual life, article 24 quinquies allows the national institute for statistics to remain sheltered from all controversy. The national institute for statistics has to be a neutral and independent organism and a trustworthy and credible instrument for the administration of the country” (INS, 1986).¹⁰

The Francophone political elite has up until this moment categorically refused any production of federal data with regard to ethnic origin, including proxies such as place of birth of the parents – and it should be said that the Flemish political elite has not made a priority of trying to change this either.¹¹ The lack of consensus on the federal level blocks any change at this power level. Since the production of statistical data is still largely a federal prerogative and the sub state statistical offices are highly dependent on the national office for statistics, the Flemish thus do not have the kind of data they would require in order to be able to count the number of allochthones.

Although the texts of the Flemish integration policy very precisely define the criteria of the category of “allochthones”, there is hence no systematic operationalisation of the notion in administrative and statistical practices in the Flemish region, while relying on federal data. The model of the neighbouring country and its category of “allochthone” have, in other words, been copied without assuring the possibility of implementing it in practice. This situation has been criticized by several academics (Verhoeven, et al., 2003; Caestecker, 2001). Some divisions of the Flemish administration have attempted to undertake an operationalisation – independently of the federal level – but very often using debatable ad hoc procedures. The Flemish unemployment agency (VDAB) has, for instance, used a number of methods and criteria to make a distinction between ethnic groups while using the category of “allochthone.” It tries to differentiate between autochthonous and allochthonous jobseekers by using data on nationality and country of birth, by using a system of voluntary registration (mainly for African and Asiatic “allochthones”), and by using a name-recognition programme (onomastic analysis on first and last name) for Turkish and Maghrebian names (Van der Straeten and Jacobs, 2004c).

The most systematic effort of identification of “allochthones” in Flanders, however, stems from the domain of education. In 1993, the “declaration of non-discrimination” (*non-discriminatieverklaring*) strived to obtain a better repartition of foreign origin pupils and to fight against discriminatory practices. A specific policy of positive discrimination was developed (*onderwijsvoorrangsbeleid*) which allotted more financial means to schools with high numbers of allochthonous pupils (Van der Straeten and Jacobs, 2004b) and high numbers of pupils in need of special assistance. To identify these schools, an inventory of ethnic origin of pupils was systematically constructed from 1993 until the year 2000.¹² In 2000, the ethnic criterion was dropped from the set of criteria to select schools that need special support – one of the

(debatable) arguments for this was that high concentrations of ethnic pupils would be indirectly tracked down in any event through the other criteria being used.

Interestingly, the accessibility of data with regard to ethnic origin of the school population not only affected public policy but equally influenced academic research (and linked to that, in a later stage, increased the pressure of the scientific field on the political world). It seems indeed to be the case that the mere existence of this kind of data has contributed to the multiplication of scientific research on the school careers of immigrant youngsters in Flanders, contrary to the situation in the Francophone Community (Van der Straeten and Jacobs, 2004b; Florence, 2004). On Francophone side there were a lot of academics that raised the hypotheses of discriminatory practices being at the basis of poor academic performance of immigrant origin youngsters and their systematic reorientation into particular types of vocational training. However, in contrast to the Flemish situation, the Francophone researchers hardly ever had instruments at their disposal which would allow to show this in a quantitative manner.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF DATA: THE BRUSSELS CASE

In the field of education, the data that are available for the bilingual region of Brussels – in which a large majority of the population speaks French and a minority speaks Dutch – allow us to demonstrate the potential (and the limitations) of particular types of statistical constructions and the impossibility of comparing data sets when basic categories have been constructed differently. In Brussels, there are parallel Francophone and Flemish schooling systems, in which teaching is done in the French or the Dutch language respectively. The educational market of Brussels is ethnically very segregated, both on the Francophone as on the Flemish side. The segregation is a widely acknowledged fact for the vast majority of involved actors, albeit one that has not been documented in systematic scientific studies on the Francophone side. Parents have an almost complete liberty in choosing a school for their offspring. Knowledgeability of the ethnic distribution of the educational market is one of the major elements influencing parental strategies.

The registration procedures with regard to the composition of the school population are different in Francophone schools from the ones used in Flemish schools. As can be noted in Table 3 (which provides data for kindergartens), the Francophone community only distinguishes its pupils on the basis of their nationality. Every local observer, even a layman, will agree that the distribution of 69 per cent of Belgians and 31 per cent of foreigners does not correspond with the dominant social representations which circulate about the bulk of the Francophone schools in ethnic terms. Indeed, the category of offspring of immigrants is far more important in the Francophone schooling system than these figures suggest. The relevance of some kind of system of ethnic statistics would, however, be most useful on the individual school level. The creation of some sort of objective system for counting pupils of foreign origin in schools, would allow the abandonment of euphemistic and stigmatising expressions, such as “difficult schools,” which are currently routinely used to identify schools in which ethnic minority groups are overrepresented. It would equally show which schools need to clean up their act and should allow in a more diversified student population.

When we compare these figures with those of the Flemish schools in Brussels (see Table 4), one would be at first inclined to think that the presence of foreign origin pupils is less important on Francophone side than on Flemish side. This is surely not the case.

In the Flemish schools of the Brussels capital region, the registration of pupils has been done since 1991–1992 taking into account their cultural origin. A distinction has been made between “families of internal origin” (*binnenlands gezin*) and “families of foreign origin”

TABLE 3
NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN FRANCOPHONE KINDERGARTENS IN THE BRUSSELS CAPITAL-REGION ACCORDING TO NATIONALITY (2000–2001)

	Belgians		Foreigners		Total
	Number	%	Number	%	
Public (municipal)	12.132	69,0	5.536	31,0	17.668
Public (Community)	919	58,0	681	42,0	1.600
Private (Catholic)	9.755	71,0	4.025	29,0	13.780
Total	22.806	69,0	10.242	31,0	33.048

Source: Service des Statistiques (Statistical Department), Ministère de la Communauté française (Ministry of the French Community)¹³.

TABLE 4
NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN FLEMISH KINDERGARTENS IN THE BRUSSELS CAPITAL-REGION ACCORDING TO ORIGIN (2000–2004)

School year	« Belgian origin »		« Foreign origin »	
	Numbers	%	Numbers	%
00–01	5 513	55.6	4 406	44.4
01–02	5 251	52.7	4 711	47.3
02–03	5 449	54.4	4 567	45.6
03–04	5 671	55.1	4 628	44.9

Source: Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie (Flemish Community Commission) Brussels Onderwijs Punt (Brussels Education Point), <http://www.bop.vgc.be>.

(*buitenlands gezin*). Within this last category, since 2002–2003 a distinction has been made between “western families” and “non-western families.” It is not nationality but ethnic origin that is used as a criterion for counting these “foreign origin families.” In case of mixed families, it is the cultural origin of the mother that counts. Until the year 2000, a systematic collection of data on the “objective” criterion of the place of birth of the grandmother on mother’s side was undertaken within the framework of the Flemish policy of positive discrimination (*onderwijsvoorrangsbeleid*). In contrast to this systematic procedure, the data of more recent years – which have been cited above – are the product of a subjective definition on the part of the school administrators, which self evidently creates a bias.

What is of interest to us here is the fact that we cannot compare the composition of the overall school population of Francophone and Flemish schools in Brussels. In one system, only data on nationality is available, while in the other system only data on ethnic background (and not on nationality) is being collected. Given this situation it is impossible to assess whether there are more or less or as many pupils of foreign origin (or even without Belgian nationality) in the schools on Francophone side than on Flemish side in Brussels. You cannot compare apples with pears.

Clearly, the different approaches are not without political and scientific repercussions. Ethnic registration allowed for positive discrimination of schools with high numbers of foreign pupils (*onderwijsvoorrangsbeleid*) on the Flemish side (until 2000). On the Francophone side another type of data is being used, in a far less precise manner, to pursue the same objective: aggregated socio-economic data should help to determine which schools need extra support.

Moreover, the Flemish approach offered instruments that allow for the systematic study of school trajectories of immigrant origin children, of selective orientation towards particular types of schooling and, most of all, of educational segregation. Of course, punctual studies could deliver the same kind of knowledge, but only in a partial way and limiting possibilities for comparison over time. Ethnic data, or data on foreign origin, has helped to improve academic assessments and allow policy monitoring in a far more efficient way (Van der Straeten and Jacobs, 2004b; Florence, 2004).

This last remark also holds for other domains such as the labour market or the housing market. Due to a lack of qualified data it is extremely difficult at the moment to assess the precise importance of the ethno-stratification of the labour market or to judge the vastness of the problem of discrimination in job allocation, both in Flanders and Wallonia as well as in Brussels (Adam, 2004; Balancier, 2004; Van Der Straeten and Jacobs, 2004c). It is for this reason that diverse Flemish administrations, including that which is in charge of integration policy (*Interdepartementale Commissie Etnisch-Culturele Minderheden*), insist that data should be collected related to the allochthonous population. Such a demand has, up until now, been practically non-existent within Francophone institutions (Florence, 2004).

Let us note that a large part of the Francophone elite believes that what the Flemish are trying to do is dangerous. Although the ethnic data might now be useful for Flemish policies of equal opportunities, they might just as well be useful for future Flemish policies of unequal opportunities. Given the fact that the racist party *Vlaams Belang* holds 25 per cent of the votes in Flanders and fearing that it might be difficult to block them from power eternally, ethnic registration can be regarded to be playing with fire.

A DEBATE THAT ALSO DIVIDES THE ACADEMIC WORLD

The import and translation of the category of “allochthone” in Belgium and the positive effects for academic research of the production of ethnic data equally triggers debate in the scientific field (Florence, 2004b). Reflecting the importance of institutional frameworks and discursive traditions in the process of constructing scientific categories, Flemish researchers have overall uncritically adopted the notion of “allochthone” while Francophone researchers have just as routinely rejected it. Research reports written by academics from the two linguistic communities use a distinctive terminology when talking about the same groups: the Flemish use the category of “allochthone,” while the French use the category “population taken out of immigration” (*population issue de l’immigration*) or “person of foreign origin” (*personne d’origine étrangère*). It is, however, striking that no matter what linguistic background academics have, they all tend to talk about “ethnic minorities” once writing in English.

The arguments used by Francophone researchers to refuse the category of “allochthone” are threefold. First of all, it is criticized that the reference to state citizenship disappears from the concept. It lumps together in one group foreigners and nationals of foreign origin, up to the third generation in the Flemish case, thus putting groups of people together who do not dispose of the same rights. Secondly, by making a distinction – often arbitrarily – between different groups of foreign origin according to their national origin (and hypotheses about the socio-economic position linked to this national origin), a debatable cultural component is added to its definition. Moreover, the construction of the category of “allochthone” as being opposed to the “autochthone,” does not provide us with a clear definition of the latter category. The use of the category of “allochthone” furthermore seems to suggest that “allochthonous” state citizens are not so genuinely members of the nation as are the “autochthonous” citizens. Finally, the construction of this category leads to an essentialisation of social groups

that may cause the ethnicisation and racialisation of social relations. In a worst-case scenario, ethnic statistics can be an instrument for exclusionary politics.

Flemish researchers, of whom a substantial part has started to use the category of “allochthones” as a replacement for earlier used categories such as “migrants” (*migranten*), have at least three reasons for doing so despite the criticism. First of all, given the fact that some people of foreign origin in Flanders use the term themselves, Flemish academics do not consider the category to be of a belittling kind. Being “allochthone” does not mean one is a second-class citizen; it is merely an analytical distinction which is being made within the group of all citizens (just as one might distinguish men and women). Secondly and related to the first remark, they point to the fact that the notion of “allochthone” does not necessarily feed racism and does not have an outspoken racist connotation. They stress that the extreme right party *Vlaams Belang* systematically uses the terminology of “foreigners” (*vreemdelingen*) in their discourse when they talk of people of foreign origin. Moreover, if they wanted to install an exclusionist policy, they would do so in any event, with or without prior existence of ethnic registration. Thirdly, recognizing the ethnicisation of Flemish society, they motivate the use of the category of “allochthone,” being determined by place of birth, as a means to evaluate and fight against ethnic and racial discrimination on the one hand and to respond to the demands of certain ethnic minority groups to be able to defend their specificities.

All this being said, academics of both linguistic communities in Belgium admit that whatever classification is being used, there is always a double process at work: On the one hand an evaluation is being made in comparison to a group of reference which constitutes the norm, while on the other hand, a representation of the social world is being strengthened in which an ethnic division is being accentuated. For some, these are sufficient reasons to keep rejecting any form of ethnic classification; for others, they are merely important caveats that should not preclude the use of some sort of system to determine foreign origin. While there is a clear divergence of opinions in the academic field on the opportunity and relevance of the use of the imported (and translated) category of “allochthone,” there is at least a growing consensus that there is a genuine need to produce statistics that try and take into account ethnic differentiation and/or foreign origin. How this should precisely be done, is still a matter of debate.

CONCLUSION AND DEBATE

History has shown that ethnic statistics can be used for purposes of control, stigmatisation, segregation and even extermination. However, “ethnicised” groups can equally profit from the existence of such data, for instance when statistical data allow them to document their discrimination. The adoption in June 2000 of the European directive relating to equal treatment further stimulates debate on the matter of ethnic categorisation (Simon and Stavo-Debaugé, 2004). Indeed, ethnic statistics can be an indispensable instrument to objectify the degree of discriminatory practices and evaluate public policies with regard to equal opportunities and the fight against racism.

In the Netherlands, the category of “allochthone” is the central notion in the production of ethnic statistics. The category of “allochthone” was able to gain legitimacy due to its highly formalized nature (based on birth place of grandparents). Its success was not so much directly related to the bureaucratic identity of the Dutch national office for statistics (CBS) that systematized its use. Its rapid diffusion should probably rather be considered to be the expression of the special capacity of the use of statistics – amongst others, by actors like the CBS – to create performative categories (Desrosières, 2000). If the strength of the category of “allochthone” originally resided in its high degree of formalization, its weakness is that, par-

allel to its successful diffusion, it has gradually become a (dis)qualifying social category. It has proven to be a useful instrument in documenting discriminatory practices and social exclusion of ethnic groups. At the same time, however, the differentiation between western allochthones and non-western allochthones has added to the process of racialisation of Dutch society. The notion of “allochthone” has become common in academic, media and political discourse. In the process it has become polysemic and, hence, suspect (especially when suggesting that “allochthones” might not be “real” nationals).

The same problem manifests itself in Flanders, Belgium, which imported the category of “allochthone.” That is to say, it imported the word and modified its definition, while at the same time not having the means to statistically operationalise it. Statistical production is a federal competence and the federal level has not produced appropriate data, due to the resistance of the Francophone elite to anything that seems to suggest recognition of the existence of ethnic minorities (and their registration).

On the Francophone side, the importance of ethnic identity is being denied (and the notion of ethnicity is judged to be dangerous), while on the Flemish side ethnic identity is being cherished. As such, Belgium in fact embodies in a micro-cosmos of the different views that compete on the topic of ethnic registration within the European framework. Data on immigrants and ethnic minorities of different European countries are today hardly comparable. A number of countries can produce very detailed distinctions with regard to the foreign origin and composition of its population, while other countries feel the production of such data is inappropriate and dangerous. As a result, we have data on apples and pears and proper comparative social scientific work is being frustrated.

The analysis of the construction of the category of “allochthone” in the Netherlands and its importation in Belgium shows that statistical categories (and their use) are not neutral. The category of “allochthone” becomes dangerous when it suggests an inferior status. It could strengthen populist visions that distinguish between “real nationals” and those of “foreign origin.” Every ethnic category equally holds the risk of essentialism: it reifies ethnic groups by (mis)taking words for things and the signifier for the signified (De Rudder, 2000: 26). They reflect dominant opinions about who is “in” and who is “out,” which are embedded in a specific time and place. Scientific classifications, and their statistical formalisation, are not immune to this. They are equally subordinate to the societal context and power relations as other social products.

We agree with Bourdieu when he writes: “Every science which pretends to propose criteria which are in the best way anchored in reality should not forget that it does not do anything else than registering a particular *state* of the struggle of classification, that is to say, a particular state of material and symbolic relations of power between those who have an interest in this or that particular way of classifying and who, just as itself, call upon scientific authority to establish in reality and in reason an arbitrary division which it hopes to impose” (Bourdieu, 1980: 66). The double hermeneutics that are inherent to social scientific activity does not allow us to imagine the constitution of scientific categories that are truly autonomous. Products of a social and political context, they are not immutable. They can be redefined when the context changes or they can lose their relevance when they have been instrumentally used – for instance when being used more as means of declassification than as means of classification. Categories that want to distinguish social groups and individuals should thus be treated with prudence and large reservations.

Nevertheless, one should equally be able to name problems in order to resolve them and to identify particular groups in order to be able to study them. Patrick Simon has nicely formulated this dilemma with which researchers and policymakers are confronted: “(...) is it preferable to defend the invisibilisation of ethnic differences in the observational apparatus, while at the same time risking to allow hidden discriminatory practices to prosper, or should

one construct categories which, by their simple existence, can potentially reinforce a stigmatising designation of particular populations?" (Simon, 1997: 9). In the post-migration context, especially in countries with liberal nationality legislations, it is clear that the legal category of foreigner will not be sufficient as a selection criterion when wanting to evaluate the integration of groups of foreign origin. Social scientists (and policymakers) need new categories to be able to count and classify people according to their ethnic origin in order to be able to examine their integration and measure the racial discrimination or processes of social exclusion of which they are victim. The classification of ethnic groups most probably constitutes a necessary tool in the construction of an efficient policy aiming at equal opportunities and in the struggle against racism. The hesitations with regard to the performative effects of ethnic categorisations, especially in their statistical form, should invite us to epistemological vigilance but should not frighten us in a way leading to retreat.

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NOTES

1. See for instance the website of the Dutch Ministry of Justice, Foreigners and Integration: <http://www.justitie.nl/themas/meer/integratiebeleid/index.asp> [accessed 15/01/06].
2. It is believed to originally have been introduced by sociologist Hilda Verwey-Jonker in 1971 (Prins, 2000).
3. This text was written mid-January 2007.
4. It can equally be noted that, according to this definition, most members of the Dutch royal family can be considered to be "allochthones."
5. Figures are available on the basis of estimates since 1972 and on the basis of data from the municipal administrations since 1995 (following the introduction of the *Gemeentelijke Basisadministratie* in 1994).
6. Our translation. "De gemengde groep is immers interessant, omdat zij beter schijnen te presteren dan de groep waarvan de beide ouders in het buitenland zijn geboren" (Tweede Kamer, 1999–2000, document 26815, p.5, note 2).
7. In Dutch academia sometimes the term "one and a half generation" is equally used to pinpoint children born abroad from immigrants of the first generation, who later came to the Netherlands in the framework of family reunification schemes.
8. Since 1999, statistical data on this distinction were produced, starting with data for the year 1996.
9. Our translation of article 24 quinquies of the law of 4 July 1962 relative to public statistics, modified by the law of 1 August 1985: "En aucun cas, les investigations et études statistiques de l'Institut national de Statistique ne peuvent concerner la vie privée, les opinions ou activités politiques, philosophiques ou religieuses, la race ou l'origine ethnique"
10. Our translation of the following passage: "En excluant toute investigation sur les opinions ou activités politiques, philosophiques ou religieuses de la population, la race ou l'origine ethnique et la vie sexuelle, l'article 24 quinquies permet à l'Institut national de Statistique de rester à l'abri de toute controverse. L'Institut national de Statistique doit être un organisme neutre et indépendant ainsi qu'un instrument fiable et crédible d'administration du pays" (Institut national de statistique, 1986).

11. We perhaps should equally note that counting linguistic affiliation has been forbidden since 1964 (following the latest modification of the language borders).
12. Data on ethnic origin were collected in order to count the number of targeted pupils. This was done in a very precise manner. The targeted pupils (*doelgroepleerlingen*) were pupils of which the grandmother on mother's side was not born in Belgium and did not have Belgian nor Dutch nationality and of which the mother did not continue her studies after the age of 18. Since 2000 a new definition of targeted pupils was used in which ethnic origin was no longer taken directly into consideration. Schools who could benefit from the system of positive discrimination now had to have a particular number of pupils who's profile corresponded to general indicators of unequal opportunities (for the debate on the operationalisation, see: Van der Straeten and Jacobs, 2004a; 2004b).
13. The data were kindly made accessible by Mr. Alain Dufays, Director of the *Service des Statistiques, Ministère de la Communauté française*.

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