

PHD RESEARCH

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Foreigners on familiar. Sociocultural life and integration of Belgian migrants in Northern France (1850-1914) -

[Original Title : *Vreemden op vertrouwd terrain. Het sociaal-culturele leven en de integratie van Belgische migranten in Noord-Frankrijk*]

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Saartje Vanden Borre obtained her PhD at the interdisciplinary Centre for the History of Intercultural Relations at Kulak in Kortrijk. Her research focused on the integration of Belgian migrants in Northern France (1850-1914). While many historians had already contributed to our knowledge about the specific migration and integration process, there was very little qualitative research to back their opinions and suppositions.

Vanden Borre studied the sociocultural life of these Belgian migrants through the semi-official sources of club records, carnival songs and local newspapers. She showed that, even though Belgians and Frenchmen may have been competitors in the workplace, they still shared a common associational life through various organizations. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, such clubs recruited among the locals, regardless of their personal background or nationality. The vibrant sociocultural life made local society in this border region essentially *Franco-Belgian*, which in its turn facilitated the integration of Belgian newcomers.

At the end of the nineteenth century however, the French nation state forced its interpretation of what it meant to be 'French' upon the border region and its inhabitants.

Paris ruled out equality between the French and Belgian inhabitants of the northern department. Gradually, the presence of Belgians became problematic and the national authorities developed an (expensive) 'integration course' resulting in naturalisation. Belgians had suddenly become foreigners in a society they were all too familiar with.