Long after the speeches have been made, the treatises have been written and the names of the political leaders have become a distant memory, the visual language of a movement remains to move the ideology forward. For the disenfranchised, it is often the scratches, paintings and slogans in public spaces that continue to serve as a visual *ex parte* statement of political intent. But while many of these statements are ephemeral, occasionally the inscribed surface is preserved as a reminder of the struggles from which the sentiment sprang. A case in point is the Steen van Merkem (the Stone of Merkem) (see Figure 11.1). The stone originally served as the foundation for a statue of Sidronius Hosschius, a local poet and scholar who died in the seventeenth century (De Landtsheer 1965). It was irrevocably altered in 1917; the slogan painted on its side – ‘Hier ons Bloed. Wanneer ons Recht?’ (‘Here is our blood. When are our rights?’) – captured in one phrase the spirit of a Flemish-centred dogma, promulgated during and after the war, that was based on the perceived sacrifices made by Flemish soldiers and framed by their war experience along the northern portion of the Western Front, known as the Belgian Front, at the IJzer river in West Flanders. From 1915 to 1918, Flemish-minded troops known as *flamingants* worked to change the language policies of the Belgian army, an issue framed within the larger context of Flemish rights within the Belgian Francophone structure. The nationalist texts that address the language issues of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been analysed as referents in the unfolding history of Flanders. However, the visual language of the period remains to be unpacked as its own potent means of communication.

As noted by Lyman Chaffee (1993), street art, of which graffiti is part, must be understood not as a single event but as contextualized within a series of events with possible long-term implications. These organized
events serve as indicators of political and cultural discourse for group conflict. For the flamingants, the Stone of Merkem was only one form of discourse in a larger context of interventions into the established structure of the kingdom of Belgium. The flamingant soldiers used various methods to communicate their dissatisfaction. Letters of complaint were drafted to King Albert, and when flamingant dissatisfaction was not only dismissed but effectively quashed, the soldiers turned to public displays of grievance: demonstrations were organized, posters were pasted, and graffiti was scrawled throughout Flemish villages. These forms of mass media share common characteristics. They were created by a partisan non-neutral political collective through a direct, expressive and simple form of communication. Scrawled upon stone, ‘Here is our blood.