Master's Thesis

WE ARE EUROPE

An ethnography of Volt NL members during their first political campaign

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Abstract

While a new, progressive political movement, the "pan-European" party Volt, enters the European Parliament election of 2019 in the Netherlands, its members realize the difficulties advocating for more supranationalist collaboration in the current political climate. Based on three months of ethnographic fieldwork during the Volt NL campaign, this thesis uses Benedict Anderson's conceptualization of "imagined communities" to describe and analyze this work. Anderson's influential theory describes the emergence of communities and how nationalism shaped the modern world. Combining participant observation, interviews and online data analysis, I explore three challenges Volt NL members faced in advocating for their political cause – improving the European Union. The first challenge deals with using European and Volt symbols, the second with the use of modern means of communication and the third is the challenge to deal with an "elitist" or "cosmopolite" image. Volt NL members are aware of these challenges but have yet to find ways to overcome them. The state of today's society affects the applicability of Anderson's theory, because the European Union lacks "shared history" to make symbols meaningful, current communication methods differ crucially from the days of "print-capitalism" and the role of the "elite" is not perceived positively by the public today.

Acknowledgements

The new political party Volt Netherlands was founded on June 23, 2018. Although the party expanded to 6,000 enthusiasts, they unfortunately did not get enough votes for a Dutch seat in the European Parliament. During the election night, on May 23, 2019, while the exit polls were being projected on the large tv-screen, I was surrounded by all the Volt-candidates and many volunteers. When the announcement came that Volt most probably would not get a seat, the atmosphere in the room changed. For the first time in the months of fieldwork, it was not the positive and energetic Volt, but for a second, the people I observed looked tired, sad, emotional. However, very soon after that, it was not the disappointment that had the upper hand; it was the emphasis on how proud everyone was that Volters had worked so hard for this campaign. Music filled the room. Volters danced until their feet hurt that night. Those 100,000 votes were felt as an encouragement to keep going. Therefore, Volt seems to be only at the beginning of their political journey.

I want to thank all the Volters who opened up to me, trusted me and during the extreme campaign stress, always kept asking me how my thesis was going. Special thanks to Laurens, Reinier, Sasha, Jason, Tom, Juliet, Nilüfer, Mels, Koen, Roos, Jasper, Chris, Ilca, Liping, Cristina, Bibi, Jerina, Joost, Reyhan, Thijs, Bram, Friso, Elske, Reinier and Finja. You helped me so much, telling me about your dreams and fears, hopes and aspirations. Also, a thank you to Colombe and Andrea, for your inspiration and kindness. Good luck to Damian representing Volt in the European Parliament. The purple future is in your hands!

Although many students see their thesis as the greatest mountain to climb, I experienced a lot of fun while writing it. I look back at this thesis and my research as something to be proud of.

Bibliography

Introduction - "I feel European. And Dutch."[1]

At the first day of my ethnographic fieldwork, Reinier, the Dutch front-man of political party Volt, told me: "We are not acting like we are living in a globalized world, because we are still structuring our politics in a national way. I am concerned about the rising nationalism. I see how the UK voted for Brexit, I see the rise of Marine Le Pen, I see the support for Wilders and even more concerning, people like Baudet, rising to power in the Western countries. I have to do something *now*, we have to act *now*. I don't want to look back and say; I did nothing".[2] The new political party Volt was founded as a direct response to the Brexit vote in 2017 as the first "pan-European" political party. Its members hope to solve the political challenges of today with supranational solutions. However, Volt members were disappointed in May 2019 with their election results, as Damian Boeselager from Germany was the only Volt member elected instead of the twenty-five seats divided over eight countries Volt aimed for. This thesis explores the political journey of Volt members during the first three months of 2019 and their struggles.

Political scientists have commented on this so-called "rise of nationalism" in a globalizing world. Smith termed the undecided struggle between the national and the global the societal paradox in the European Union (1993, 129). The rise of globalization, internet and social media, created an interconnectedness that citizens of Europe have never experienced before. In this new playing field, Volt, as a new "pan-European" political party is trying to advocate for the European. On the other hand, a new wave of nationalism, often claimed by right-wing conservatives and populists also gained momentum in many EU countries (Rydgren 2017, 486 and Dyrness and Abu El-Haj 2019, 1). Theoretically, most European citizens have the opportunity to travel, work and study abroad. However, it is unclear to what extent citizens use these opportunities but moreover, to what extent they *feel* part of a supranational community. Perhaps, Volt members would describe themselves as such and want to increase the public's enthusiasm for the European cause. This thesis explores the strategy of Volt Netherlands applied and the impact it had on Volters in their 2019 campaign for the European Parliament.

[1] Observed during a discussion at the Volt office. Notes, March 19 2019.
[2] Notes, February 22, 2019.

Theoretical framework

Benedict Anderson's 1983 book *Imagined Communities* still is a very influential work on nations and nationalism. He explores the concept of the "nation" and the sense of community people of a nation experience (4). He conceptualizes the nation as an "imagined community", that could only exist after certain economic prosperity, scientific and communication revolutions – but mostly through the birth of "print-capitalism" as soon as the sixteenth century (34-5). "Print-capitalism […] made it possible to think about themselves and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways" (36). An "imagined community" is *imagined* because it is impossible to personally know each member in a nation (6), it is imagined as *limited* because it has clear physical boundaries (7) and it is imagined as *sovereign* as it is legitimate, meaning that it requires a government with executive and legislative powers. Anderson designs a framework for people's connection to the nation-state, as according to Anderson, "[i]ndeed, "nation-ness" is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time." (1983, 3). In this thesis, this theoretical framework is used to analyze the connection Volt members have with the European Union.

In Anderson's view, there are multiple cultural, economic and scientific influences that helped create an "imagined community". By definition, this points to the "temporality" of the nation – as he opposes the notion of the nation being a static state (1983, 4). The "imagined community" is not static because these influences are not static. To understand "imagined communities" or its cultural artifacts, "[…] we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being, in what ways their meaning changed over time and, why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy" (4). Volt's members' relation to the European Union needs to be explored in this theoretical context of temporality.

Does the European Union fulfill Anderson's criteria to be regarded a "imagined community"? As Sassatelli claims; "The European Union is imagined with over 420 million citizens, limited and sovereign, and it is a community with a belief in deep unity" (2002, 437). Volt's lack of political success thus far may point to the discrepancy between Sassatelli's statement and practice, experienced by Volt. Volt's pan-Europeanism might be understood through Anderson's theoretical thinking and political "imagined communities", but does "pan-Europeanism" find popular support?

Through ethnographic research during Volt NL's political campaign, I noticed three crucial challenges Volters faced in their efforts. The first challenge is to overcome the clash between the supranational and the national "imagined community" that Volt members

constantly run into during their campaign period as they are trying to appeal to the European community. The apparent lack of public interest in the symbols Volters use may illustrate this clash. The second challenge is to optimize the possibilities of modern digital communication, exploring whether digitalization and online communication can have a similar role as "print-capitalism". The final challenge is to make use of the elite, cosmopolite character of Volt members, fulfilling a role similar to Anderson's "creole pioneers". These challenges together shape the answer to the main research question: how do Volt members advocate for the European Union as an "imagined community", what challenges do they face in this process and how do they deal with them?

The new political party Volt formulated six challenges that need to be tackled in "each European country and Europe as a whole".[3] Overall, they want to reform and strengthen the European Union. The European Union is an economic and political Union with 28 member-states. The European Union, as an economic collaboration, was found through the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957. The EU as the political and social Union it is today, was established with the treaty of Maastricht in 1992. In this treaty, the EU received more supranational legislative powers and the introduction of the Euro was regulated (Shaw and Cremona 1996, 69). The European Union has three primary supranational institutions: The European Commission, the European Court of Justice and the European Parliament. The balance of power between these institutions shifted throughout the history of the EU, as the ambition of the Union also has been shifting from economic goals to more socio-cultural cohesion (Tsebelis and Garrett 2001, 359). The European Commission launched several cultural symbolic projects, such as the European Cultural Cities, with the main purpose of creating more cultural unity (Sassatelli 2002, 443). The Commission also launched several projects for creating more social cohesion in the Union (Atkinson and Davoudi 2000, 428). The EU has been actively establishing and substantiating itself as a supranational institution, focusing more on such socio-cultural initiatives (Boyer 2005, 522). At present, the European Union already fulfills the definition of an "imagined community" as coined by Anderson. However, at least for Volt, there is still a lot of room for improvement towards a more "democratic, transparent and stronger Europe, a federal Europe […]." (Volt 2018).

[3] For more information about the challenges, please see: https://www.volteuropa.org/.

To understand the concept of an "imagined community", one must understand the concepts of the "nation" and "citizenship". Firstly, sociologist Anthony D. Smith's emphasizes that a "nation" is formed by shared culture and historical roots (2009, 42-43). "Nations are, by definition, territorialized communities, that is, communities the majority of whose members have come to reside in an historic territory or homeland and to feel a strong attachment to it" (*ibidem*, 49). Political scientist Montserrat Guibernau points to a more towards a cultural similarity within a nation: "The nation-state is a modern institution, defined by the formation of a kind of state which has the monopoly of what it claims to be the legitimate use of force within a demarcated territory and seeks to unite the people subject to its rule by means of *cultural homogenization*" (2004, 132). In both views, the *limited, sovereign* and *imagined* aspects of Anderson's conceptualization linger through the lines, as respectively attachment is from emotional heritage, the people are subjected to the government's rule and the community is clearly demarcated.

The study of citizenship today is more popular than ever (Bellamy 2008, 18). Citizenship, as an anthropological concept, is often distinguished in biological and political citizenship. Biological citizenship is the biological basis of a population as a basis for its social membership and claims to rights of citizenship, often studied in relation to the nation-state (Petryna 2004, 142). Scholars Foucault and Agamden were critical of the way anthropologists approach biological citizenship and shifted more towards "political citizenship". Political citizenship differs from the biological, because it is about a relationship with institutions that hold legal, executive or military power, hence not limited to the state or the democratic government (Lazar 2013, 5). With the changing political realities, globalization and digital technologies, political citizenship is not just about the subject and the state anymore (if it ever was) (Rose and Novas 2003, 2 and Ong 2006, 499). "Citizenship is about rights, access, and belonging to a particular community" (Cini and Borragán 2016, 397). Citizenship is firstly organized legally, with institutional rights for a certain group of people – automatically leaving out another group. Subsequently, citizenship is about *belonging* within a certain group, defined for example by territorial boundaries. However, for social scientists, citizenship goes *beyond* the legal status of a person and for anthropologists, citizenship is more focused on understanding the social practices of citizenship (Lazar 2013, 4, Hurenkamp, Tonkens and Duyvendak 2011, 206). This work focuses on the social definition of citizenship as a feeling of *belonging*.

Volt seeks to relate to European citizens. In their influential work, Cini and Borragán describe European citizenship as often "thinner", legally and emotionally, than national

citizenship (2016, 400). "As both a new supranational institution and as a transnational practice, this new citizenship has repercussions for the relationship between citizens and 'their' community. This occurs along three core dimensions: first, the *identity* of citizens (who belongs where, and why); second, the type and range of *rights* citizens can evoke (which rights can be evoked within which institution and on what level?); and third, the channels of *access* to participation in the wider political and social community of 'European citizens' (who is allowed to participate, on what grounds and where?). It goes without saying that these three dimensions have wider implications for the type of community the EU might become" (411). As the research on which this thesis is based took place in the first months of 2019, it analyzes the "type of community the EU" is at this point in time.

Although globalization "challenges the notion of citizenship tied to the terrain and imagination of a nation-state" (Ong 2006, 499), socially, though, globalization meant a complicated intertwinement of the new interconnection of people, while the nation-state was still approached as the primary political belonging of its citizens (Lazar 2013, 12). The 1990s created a changed political landscape (Tsing 2000, 331), with meant a possible new role for Europe. When Volters advocate a federal Europe, they advocate a transfer of sovereignty from the nation to the Union. However, people seem unwilling to give up national sovereignty to this supranational institution of the EU.

Methodology & Ethics

Methodology

This thesis is based on fourteen weeks of ethnographic fieldwork within the political party Volt Netherlands, from February to the end of May 2019. Volt Netherlands, in short Volt NL, is officially an independent association by Dutch law. However, Volt NL is a member of Volt Europa and follows its (political) policies. The European Parliament elections of 2019 are the first elections Volt NL entered.

In order to answer the research question, multiple ethnographic methods were used. My main methods were participant observation, interviews, and analysis of online material. My main physical field during the day was the Volt NL office in Amsterdam and in the evenings, I visited debates or events where Volt candidates were invited to speak.

Participant observation and "being there" is a combination of observing, taking notes, asking questions and critically analyzing what you are seeing (O'Reilly 2012, 98). During my stay at the Volt office, members were always discussing (political) matters, asking each other for help or discussing an upcoming event. Observing Volt members was very fruitful, because the group was extravert and expressive. My questions and thoughts were welcome. Participant observation is a complex form of doing research and much more than solely "being somewhere". For example, one of the aspects that anthropologists struggle with is taking notes (102). Finding the right balance between taking enough notes, being present in the moment, not taking too much notes was hard for me. During my research period, I switched my approach several times and found that taking notes on my laptop, phone or notebook was too distracting for me sometimes. Therefore, often when I would hear or see something interesting, I would simply save a quick voice-memo on my phone.

When I visited external events, taking notes was easier: A Volt candidate would be up on the stage and I would be in the crowd. I talked to other guests, Volt and non-Volt members, while taking notes (sometimes through voice-memos) and thinking about what I experienced. Afterwards, on the way home, I sometimes discussed my thoughts with the candidate and he or she gave his or her views. Predominantly, this was about the events of that day, but sometimes, a more theoretical discussion emerged. Most Volt members are highly educated and can express themselves well, and welcome intellectual discussions. Often, they were motivated to help me with my work.

Starting in March 2019, I accompanied the party's first candidate to many events for which he was invited to speak. We discussed upfront what message he wanted to communicate to the audience. Some of these events were debates, where there would be five or six political parties present before an audience of fifty to a hundred people. During these events, I spoke to as many other (Volt) attendees as I could, to also get their views on what *they* experienced.

A sufficient amount of time during the days at the office, I invested my time in online research. At first, I wanted to know everything about Volt's history, policies and people. As my research started to progress, and I knew I wanted to analyze the role of online communication, I shifted my focus to social media. I analyzed the Facebook-posts, livestreams, group chats and Workplace. I joined many online, Skype-like meetings of different committees. Because a significant part of Volt's communication takes place online, I approached this information as another aspect of my participants *life* (O'Reilly 2012, 175). Comments and posts are therefore analyzed as found data.

During my first weeks of fieldwork, I conducted two structured interviews with prominent Volt members. However, this formal interview setting was not optimal. I felt that the answers they gave in this setting were more nuanced or "politically correct" than is a less formal setting. This is a well-known problem arising within structured interviews (O'Reilly 2012, 109). After discussing this with my supervisor, I decided to focus on unstructured, and shorter, interviews. During events or gatherings, I would ask one or two persons to come sit with me and I would ask them a few open questions for about twenty minutes. I recorded and transcribed, some people did not want to be recorded and their answers were noted by me. This, for me, evolved into a comfortable way of doing research and this was also appreciated by my research participants. Combining all of the above, I conducted twenty interviews.

Engaged Anthropology

For me, it was important to not only be a researcher, but to also be engaged with the activities of the research participants. When doing engaged anthropology, different practices vary during your fieldwork (Low and Merry 2010, 207). I often shared my data with my research participants – always through conversation. I would do this – as much as possible – without (political) bias. I also worked in the organization; organizing events and helping Volt members wherever they needed help. According to Low and Merry, this form of collaboration can work well for an anthropologist: "Participation in a research site is a low-key form of collaboration in which the researcher works with local organizations or social movements in carrying out their missions but does not actively lead them" (209).

I noticed quickly that in my case, "participant observation" would be more aimed at participating rather than observing, as for me, this felt as the most natural style to become part of the group. At the Volt office, the spirit was very much guided by *doing things*. For Volt members this was a very meaningful way of spending their days, as ultimately, *doing a lot* would make the difference between political success and failure for Volt.[4] I got involved in organizing Volt events very quickly. During my first week, I volunteered for the task of organizing a national congress in Utrecht, my home town. I also became a paying member, to show a decent amount of support to the Volters. On May 23, 2019, I voted for Laurens, my gatekeeper and number three on the Volt ballot. I carefully considered my vote, because I lack loyalty to any other political parties and I wanted to show my gratefulness to Laurens.

I do strongly think that engagement and research can be achieved together in anthropological accounts (Low and Merry 2010, 211). In this case, the collaboration is also affected by my political views. I agreed with a lot of political ideas Volt proposed, such as a humane policy for refugees. This put me in a position where I could discuss many political matters with my research participants, without conflict or misunderstanding. Positively, this was fruitful for my research because it gave me access of in-depth information on Volt and its members. On the other hand, there was a risk of getting too involved and thus lacking a certain scholarly distance.

I sometimes experienced these risks of my engaged research. Ethnographic work is based on close relationships with research participants (Nolan 2003, 174). As Sluka states, "[t]he success of ethnographic fieldwork is in large measure determined by the ability to establish good rapport and develop meaningful relations with research participants" (Robben and Sluka 2012, 137). These relationships, especially with gatekeepers Laurens and Reinier, were valuable for me and for my research. However, I do agree with Low (2010), that in some cases it was difficult for them to understand me and my role, because the participants assumed that I shared their (political) values (213). For example, at the national congress on March 17, there was a documentary-maker, who was making a film about politics and Volt. As he was interviewing many Volt members, Reinier and Laurens told him to interview me as the organizer of the event. The filmmaker and Volters approached me and although I did not want to disappoint them, I felt obligated to tell them that I was here as a researcher – with my own

[4] Notes, March 18 2019.

political views. The interviewer asked me questions about what I liked about Volt. This was a question I could answer as a researcher and as a Volt member.[5]

Terminology

Careful use of language is a vital part of research. Researches have to be aware of their words, the potential effect of using these words – especially when you are working with research participants. Most participants, as they are not in a researching role, as less aware of their use of language. I carefully considered how to incorporate the communications that I observed in this thesis. In a sense, I feel that I cannot incorporate all conversations literally in this thesis – as Volt members were sometimes not aware of my presence as a researcher. A conversation between the researcher and the research participants is a vital part of this research.

My research participants would often use "European Union", "Europe", the "continent" and "EU" interchangeably. In this work, I tend to use the "European Union" (or EU in short), as this is the political space the elections took place in May 2019.

The term "Volters" is used to describe Volt members. "Volt NL" is the official name for the political party Volt Netherlands. Volt Europa" was founded on March 27, 2017, firstly named "Vox Europe". This name was abandoned after the discovery of a far right-wing political party with the same name.[6] Certain information can only be achieved through searching on "Vox Europe".

In this thesis, "pan-Europeanism" is used to describe Volt's political narrative, as this terminology is used by Volt founders and members (Cahen-Salvador 2018).

My position

An important factor of ethnographic fieldwork is reflection on the self: "[…] ethnographic fieldwork is an engaged, embodied and emotional involvement in the lives of others. Managing this ethically can be very challenging." (O'Reilly 2012, 71). During my fieldwork, thanks to my supervisor, I kept a separate diary which was called "My role as a researcher: A Reflection".

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[5] The documentary can be accessed through this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DtqnKSLOuu4&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR3Ev-MNZa-nm0C3HtSSgZb9SC0agI42wlCtIuC-r2TiXhEi38zaYnMUHe8. My contribution can be viewed from 4.20 mins to 4.40 mins.

[6] For more information about Vox Europa, see: https://www.corriere.it/esteri/18_febbraio_21/i-millennial-volt-vogliono-dare-scossa-ue-rilanceremo-l-europa-1f79e9fa-16eb-11e8-b630-41a05c9e9642.shtml?refresh_ce-cp.

Doing ethnography always implies constant subjectivity (7) and being aware of this subjectivity is necessary for reflective research. I am aware that I bring subjectivity to the field at all times and I am constantly influenced by my past, my present and my fears and desires.

Ethnographic work is not just about academic research, it is also about making and losing friends, it is about pushing your boundaries and it is about *who you are* as a researcher. The key values that I honored during this fieldwork were loyalty, honesty, humor, love and hygiene. I struggled with loyalty the most; since I did feel guilty towards my research participants. I wrote in my reflection rapport: "I am relieved I had my own hotel room in Rome, because I could not share the unlimited happiness of the Volters tonight".[7] I never conducted research with research participants before and I struggled with keeping an emotional balance between objective researcher and participant. On the one hand, I was an anthropology student, trying to improve my understanding of certain social and political issues. Theoretically, the outcome of the election was of interest, but not crucial to me. On the other hand, I was a friend of many Volt members, who were very much involved in the political campaign and the outcome election. I wanted them to succeed, but I was not as deeply engaged as they were.

After visiting the General Assembly in Rome, I discussed my role with the Volt NL board. I emphasized my researching role, while also trying to bring across how I appreciated the Volt members and their unlimited positive energy and friendship. Talking about it, I grew more comfortable and reconciled with my two roles. For various Volt members, it was difficult to understand that my most important goal was my research and not the party achieving seats in the European Parliament. When I started my research, also because of the tasks I took upon myself, I was not only a researcher, but also an active member and a reliable occupant of the Volt office. During the final weeks before the campaign, I had to devote a decent amount of time to actually *writing* the research and this affected my work for Volt. However, Volters were very supportive about my thesis and by organizing one final event on May 20th, I also showed my devotion to the Volters. In retrospect, I feel I complied with the ethical standards that I formulated before I embarked on this project.

Research group

Volt Europe, founded in 2017, is a self-proclaimed progressive "pan-European" political movement, without any traditional left- or rightwing political positioning. They focus on European collaboration for transnational socio-political issues such as sustainability or

[7] Notes, March 25.

migration. Its founders are Andrea Venzon, Colombe Cahen-Salvador and Damian Boeselager. Volt Netherlands was founded in June 2018. There are two possible ways for people to connect structurally to Volt. There is the possibility of becoming a paying member and in May 2019, around 500 people in the Netherlands were paying members. However, one can also become a "Friend of Volt", which is only a subscription to the Volt NL newsletter. According to the Volt board, almost 6,000 people subscribed by the election night. Volunteers can also show support by organizing events or helping Volt with other matters. This group is categorized as *active Volt members,* as they actively support the organization with direct action. The approximately 150 truly *active* Volt members were effectively the biggest part of my research group. In a broad sense, the 6,000 subscribers to the Volt newsletter – were in one way or another all part of my research group. Many of them responded to Facebook posts online, visited one of the many (Volt) events where I was or talked to me on the street about Volt. The board, consisting of eight young individuals, and the candidates, consisting of 24 Dutch people, were my main focus. In this group, there was a 50/50 division between males and females and although most of them were in their twenties, the average age of my interviewees was 39.

Anonymity

It is very complicated to maintain the anonymity of subjects in this thesis, because Volt members are recognizable in different ways. This has to be considered, because there is always a risk of the thesis being "outed" by journalist media (O' Reilly 2012, 84). However, my research participants and I agreed that this thesis would and could only flourish when written freely. All of my research participants were willing to be named in my thesis and they are thus not anonymized.

Chapter Two - “Europe Day”

Figure 1: Volt Netherlands Facebook post, May 9, 2019. “Europe Day as a first EU-wide Holiday? From us it’s a definite yes! Freedom/Peace/Prosperity/Volt. We would like to wish everyone a great Europe Day! Enjoy it! (to a certain extent) #WeAreEurope.

The campaign manager said: “We have to do something for Europe Day”. All attendees of the meeting agreed. There was a big calendar on the wall and Lars and Laurens, both Volt board members, stood in front of it with different markers in their hands. Lars explained: “I am pretty sure that Volt Europe might have something planned, but we can definitely also do something as Volt NL.” People started pitching ideas and after a few hours, it was chaotic, typical for Volt meetings. The chaos resulted of a combination of enthusiasm, fresh energy and nervousness for the campaign. The planned activity for May 9, Europe Day, was decided: a team of Volters would sing the European Anthem, “flashmob style”, at the Hague Central.

On May 9th at the Hague central railway station, there was a girl playing the piano, wrapped in an EU-flag. She started playing and one girl started singing:

Unity has come to Europe,
Unity is here to stay.

Unity is our future -

Long live Europe, come what may!

North and South will work together

Just as friends and neighbors should.

East and West will grow together -

Brotherhood and sisterhood!

Europe, may your peoples flourish,

Let the common banner rise!

Stars of gold and dark blue skies

Are the colors that we prize.

Figure 2 – 5: Printscreens from the video of "Europe Day" on Volt Facebook page. May 9, 2019.

As more members joined in, they all looked down to their phones or sheet of paper with the lyrics of the European anthem. Most of them were dressed in the purple Volt sweaters, three large Volt flags wavered. Not a lot of singers were familiar with the lyrics of the song. It became very clear that the message, although so bravely put together, did not reach or speak to any possible audience. Nobody paid attention to the performance, sang along or took pictures.

I wanted to understand how Volters looked back on this event. To them, the event was actually quite successful: "Celebrating a public holiday creates a feeling of unity, just like we celebrate King's Day here. For us, it is important to be visible *and* to anticipate to the feeling of unity people could have with the EU. With this flashmob, we sent out a positive image of the EU, Volt and hopefully, it will appeal to people. Also, it is just *fun*!" This comment shows how Volters appreciate the symbols of the European Union such as a public holiday in order to spread their message and feel united. In their perception, they appealed to a *feeling of unity* people have with the European Union. However, I wondered if the use of symbols in this situation was effective as the Volters were perhaps not understood.

To Anderson, an important aspect of an "imagined community" is that people become aware of the others in the nation and "relate themselves to others" (1983, 36). Anderson describes how receiving information about a "solid" society creates a feeling of a trustworthy past and future for the community (26). Moreover, a national anthem is the perfect example of

the symbolization of a joined experience (145). Perhaps, *the lack of* a joined experience explains my observations of the crowd's lack of response to the European anthem or flag. Anderson points to the need of a shared experience, a "simultaneous" past (29) for a nation.

For the European Union, a relatively new institution, the "past" is not the binding cultural factor. "The unity of European culture is not so much seen in past and myth, as well as projected into the future as the result of an 'objective' acting of Europe as a singular subject" (Duroselle, 1990 in Sassatelli 2002, 438). The binding of European citizens relies on other factors: "[t]here can only be a European identity if it is civic – based on a 'social contract' – and not cultural – based on a shared tradition" (439). Sassatelli concludes that when imagining Europe, the *unity* practices through *diversity* more so than a shared past (438). This belief, according to her, is emphasized through the nation-state model within the larger European Union and moreover, is a significant part of the "cultural policy" of the European Union itself (440). The scene I witnessed proved that the public and suggested that even Volters do not feel connected to the symbols of the European Union. At the very least, the Volters are challenged to establish these symbols as meaningful to the European public.

Symbolically *imagining* the European Union

As stated in the introduction, Volt members use "Europe Day" and all its symbolic components to advocate for the supranational community of the European Union. In multiple ways, through celebrating an EU holiday, singing the EU anthem, using a certain terminology and flags, Volters try to appeal to a sense of "belonging" to the European Union. Perhaps they are right to do so: symbols play a big role in the process of identification and sense of belonging (Bruter 2003, 1151). "Symbols have a very strong effect on the distinct cultural aspects of political identities (*ibidem,* 1168). "Symbols" as such cannot be classified easily: personal perceptions of symbols can differ and are differently experienced in all settings (Manners 2011, 249). However, symbols may be helpful for appealing to a shared community, as they are "collective representations […] by means of which society becomes conscious of itself" (*ibidem*, 262)." Moreover, "National symbols, in particular national anthems and flags, provide perhaps the strongest, clearest statement of national identity. In essence, they serve as modem totems (in the Durkheimian sense) -signs that bear a special relationship to the nations they represent, distinguishing them from one another and reaffirming their identity boundaries" (*ibidem*, 244). Symbols, therefore, can be very successful tools for creating unity and identity for a *nation*, however, how do the symbols used by Volters appeal to the European Union?

Reinier, Volt's main candidate, argued that the symbols of the European Union work, despite their apparent lack of popularity. "I think it's good that we wave the European flag and sing the anthem. Although nobody in the world actually *knows* the song, it's good to have European symbols we can use and actually, surprise people with a little bit. In the end, it's not really an everyday thing to see, but I hope people enjoy it."[8] In his view, the success lies in the use of the symbol itself, not its familiarity. Scholars, such as Rodriguez argue differently, when researching how (national) anthems and lyrics are part of the process of imagining a political community (2016, 337-8). He states, for the anthem to be a significant part of the imagining, the public has to be familiar with it: "This is another way of saying that we cannot produce interpretations of things that we are not familiar with or have not experienced in some respect" (Rodriguez 2016, 348). In the "Europe Day" case, the audience seemed completely unfamiliar with the anthem, which would mean people would not be able to reproduce the symbol, and thus, *imagining* the European Union would not be promoted through the use of this symbol. The familiarity of symbols was often discussed between Volters. Most times, Volters would quite quickly agree how although the familiarity would be lacking *now,* this does not mean this is unchangeable. Unfamiliarity can change over time and therefore, shifts rise between the role of the anthem and the matter of identification (Rodriguez 2016, 348). Improving the familiarity of the EU-symbols seems a challenge to Volt.

Apart from familiarity, success of a symbol could be dependent on the way its audience responds to it – as a symbol can also remind people of a past they do not want to be a part of. For example, the "Creoles" who "formed and led" new states as described by Anderson (1983. 50) can be imagined having a different connotation to the Spanish flag than the native population in those states. Would a negative response make the symbol in question less "successful", in a sense? "Any reaction is better than no reaction, I guess," is what my research participant argued. "Especially for us, as we are trying to get attention, just to raise awareness that we actually exist. Of course, we don't want to give out a different message, but I would say that reaching a big audience would be the most important thing. For now."[9] The success of the symbolism used by Volt could lay partly, therefore, in reaching a big audience. However, the "no reaction" I observed, demonstrates the huge challenge for Volt in this respect.

Symbols can also help a community to "ensure a sense of continuity", by "separating '*us*' from '*them*'" (Smith 2009, 25). Using a national flag can play a part in this process

[8] Informal conversation, May 3 2019.
[9] Semi-structured interview, May 11 2019.

(Elgenius 2005, 47). My research participants waved Volt and EU flags during events or when handing out flyers. The combination of the Volt and European flag is to create "visibility" and "the feeling of being a group".[10] This feeling of belonging to a certain community, and automatically, creating a "we", is an important part of the imagining of the nation. A potential adverse effect of using a symbol as a flag, is the exclusion of those to whom the flag does not apply. Because as opposed to "us", according to Anderson, there is a "they" and the "Other" (1983, 141). This division is vital to a sense of nation. Using the Volt flag during "Europe Day", may have resulted in people feeling "separated" from the Volt group. Similarly, the effect of the EU flag could be that people felt left out. This is obviously the opposite effect Volters tried to accomplish. One member stated about the EU flag: "It represents the relationship between the European Union and Volt: without the EU, Volt would not be able to unify and harmonize. But moreover, it is something people will recognize."[11]

Figure 3: Volt General Assembly (December 2018) in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Retrieved through Volt's Facebook Page.

Historical and Institutional Roots

It is argued in the previous section that Volt's use of symbols did not bring the effect they aimed for. This section explores the lack of historical roots of the European Union and the reasons *why* these symbols are not (yet) successful in their purpose for Volt. The most important impediment is the struggle between the (lack of) cultural identity of the European Union, as

[10] Informal conversations with two research participants, resp. March 9 and April 3 2019.
[11] Notes, May 9 2019.

compared to the nation-states in it. This emphasizes that symbols are never meaningful as such, as they can only be useful with a complete strategy for cultural binding of the "imagined community".

Symbols are often used in a political campaign or process and are therefore logically part of the Volt campaign. However, the use of symbols alone is not sufficient – they should be used as part of a story (Smith 2009, 75). France, during the Revolution, created a new flag, national calendar and anthem to emphasize the feeling of unity (*ibidem*). In France's case, the Revolution was paired with great political measures, such as the democratization and secularization. Anderson describes how certain things are "cultural products of nationalism – poetry, prose fiction, music, plastic arts" (1983, 141-3). Symbols emerge and can only be effective when they come with other "cultural products of nationalism". Symbols, after they emerge, can be a useful tool. "Being consistently exposed to symbols of European integration does, indeed, reinforce a citizen's sense of identification with Europe […]" (Bruter 2003, 1165-6). Perhaps, the first challenge for Volt is to expose their public "consistently" to the symbols of the European Union. This is obviously hampered by Volt's lack of means.

This lack of means does not apply to the European Union, however, they also face problems. An important struggle the European Union has with familiarizing its cultural symbols is the competition with the nation-states. The friction between nation-states and the European Union has been present since the beginning of the Union. "Although Europe is currently in the process of defining and expanding a new public space, this project is severely hampered by the nation-state model, which dominates proceedings" (Borgström 2002, 1231). Possibly, Volt would have attracted more attention when using the national anthem and flag.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the first crucial challenge Volt NL members faced during the political campaign of 2019. Understandably, Volt NL members use symbols to create a "sense of community" between them and their audience. However, at this point in time, the public's orientation does not seem to be focused on symbols of the European Union or Volt. "Europe Day" was packed with different Volt and EU symbols, and although the public reacted indifferently, most Volt participants felt the event was successful. However, Volters realize how the use of symbols today is only a first step towards familiarizing the public with the

ambitions of Volt. Volters find other ways to create a sense of community, for example, by prioritizing online communication forms.

Chapter Three – "Zoom"

At 8.55 PM, I received the link from a website named "Zoom" and the online Volt Fundraising Team meeting was ready to start. "Zoom" is a tool for online meetings with people in different locations and since Volt has most of its members spread out over the European continent, this system was used for most meetings. This system is also used by Volt NL. The meeting started, and five guys participated through their own webcams. "Welcome, Emma." A Volt member I have never met before, welcomes me and turns immediately back to the agenda of the meeting. "Reinier got us a venue, it's right next to Amsterdam South station, so that's great. The fundraising event is going to be a dinner, hopefully with rich attendees." Four out of five committee members would come by bicycle, as they all lived in Amsterdam. As we discussed the details, such as the menu, program and speakers, it was clear that everyone felt a strong responsibility for making this charity event a success. Both Volt founders would attend the Fundraising dinner and most of Volt NL funds depended on the revenue. The dinner took place on April 7th, 2019 and that was the first time most of the committee from the "Zoom" call met in person. The dinner was located on the top floor of a typical business restaurant: mostly grey tones, the staff looked neat and in the corner a man was playing the piano. Upstairs, the room was already set. Before the dinner started, the committee members introduced themselves to each other. To me, this was peculiar, why would the committee not meet in advance to the event, as most members lived in Amsterdam? How do you build on a communal group culture if the communication takes place solely online?

Benedict Anderson describes in his book *Imagined Communities* how new forms of communication can have a strong relationship with community-forming (1983, 34-5). "Print-capitalism" in combination with a new economic ideology, "[…] made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves and to relate to others, in profoundly new ways" (36). People started to be aware of what was happening throughout the nation. "Print-capitalism" promoted the birth of a national language. "Print-capitalism" was, for Anderson, a crucial element in facilitating the *imagining* of the "imagined community", however, it was always combined with certain historical events.

Today, can the new forms of digital communication be as successful "print-capitalism" in building a community? Do digital media allow Volters to relate to each other "in profoundly new ways"? "Print-capitalism" laid the basis for national consciousness as a "united field of

communication", with crucial "fixity" and new "socio-political eminence" (in this case, new digital languages of power) (Anderson 1983, 44-5).

United field of communication

One of the most important aspects of the success of "print-capitalism" in creating national consciousness, is the "simultaneity" and "unification" that mass-printing had on an information flow (Anderson 1983, 37-8). Compared to governments in the 16th century, Volt has many more possible forms of communication and sending out information to its members and the public. There is indeed a struggle to juggle the endless possibilities of communication for a lot of members, as this citation shows:

"I saw Volt for the first time in the newspaper, the NRC. I liked the idea, and visited their website, where I registered. 'if you register, we will call you within two weeks', the screen told me. But nobody called. So anyway, I waited for about a month and then I got a call weeks later from someone who I'd never actually met but he invited me to come to a meeting in the Hague. So yeah, about three months later I went to a meeting, Liping and Lars were there and two other people and that was the Hague team. I went two times and then suddenly I was head of the Hague. I was in charge of the news-email and organizing events. Luckily, I did some Zoom calls with other city-leads, so I got the hang of it pretty quick."[12]

In this citation, as Jason explains the process of becoming a city-lead, he mentions six different ways of communication: the newspaper, the website, a telephone-call, the physical meeting, a news-email and the digital meeting-app "Zoom". Apparently, Jason and other Volt members are sometimes confused or even irritated by the different information and communication mediums. The following screenshots are all from the "Volt NL Dialogue Forum", the primary WhatsApp-group for Volt members throughout the Netherlands:

[12] Interview Jason, March 18.

Figure 4: collection of screenshots from the "Volt NL Dialogue Forum". Translation (from left to right, top to bottom): "This group is not meant for sharing sensitive information, there are enough other "closed" groups on social media, such as Workplace. There only approved members can join. This group is open because we want to be accessible to others, this is a choice. That is why we want to keep discussions on Workplace. Also, I do not have the idea that this group is being read by outsiders, but I can check the current members in this group. If the admin refreshes the link then, this becomes practicably a closed group. Anyway, the rights choice is not to share sensitive information in this group, but keep having a discussion. "There has been shared some information. Probably through newsletters I don't receive. It would be nice if there would be some information on the website or Wiki so you can point to that. I am happy to help you make this accessible." "Ok, great. I am curious how you guys get to argument position on the European level. Do they also work in team and do these teams then work with an agenda? "no idea." "I suspect this is still being decided." "I am afraid there is little GENERAL information familiar about the teams and their processes. This can be because everything takes place on different platforms and different groups (Workplace, WhatsApp, physical meetings) where we might THINK that other people already know, but I do not know if that is really the case… Not everybody is at involved or/and not everyone has the means or accessibility to the same documents (for example, not everyone is in Workplace or not everybody knows their way around, for example me.) I think for the National Assembly this might be an important job to give information about this, maybe even to give some training into how to deal with all different tools. Also, I think that we probably do not even know who is part of which group and what he or she is doing there…".

These screenshots show a certain discomfort and confusion amongst Volt members, because of the wide diversity of ways to communicate. Also, there seems to be a lack of leadership to navigate members through the different of information channels. Moreover, there is no control over the information that is shared – everyone (if wished) participates. According to Anderson, the reliability of information, everyone receiving the same information, is one of the key elements for the newspaper to have had such a strong role in creating a shared consciousness (1983, 67, 81). Every citizen read the same newspaper, that was written by professionals under clear leadership of an editor. However, social media are structured differently. The amount of interaction is increased, from almost none to nearly endless, but WhatApp groups cannot be edited.

The Volt NL board make a lot of efforts to strengthen their grip on the information flow. In contrast to the WhatsApp group, the board constructed a policy for the Volt Nederland Facebook page. The information stream was organized by a certain strategy, campaigning positively. This shows through various Facebook-posts and -comments, of which the following is an example:

Figure 5: Printscreen from Volt Facebook-page. Translation: "Volt on Tour! People are responding positively to our story! Campaigning gives so much new energy. To do: tell as many friends, family and colleagues that you are going to vote for Volt! #VoteVolt

This post shows a clear form of the positive information strategy. The posts give positive commentary on Volt's events, campaign or other debates or media-performances. The use of "we" and "our story" is meant to indicate the "collective nature of the group", creating a feeling of doing the job together (Adunbi 2017, 232). Facebook, in this case, is used as a tool to create a new political space, in which there is positive attention and communication with its (potential) members, emphasizing *unity*. Social media is a usable platform for political discussion: "The "visible concealment" granted to social media citizens allows them to speak their minds in a public setting and spread their criticisms of the government throughout a wide audience, while remaining sheltered from political repercussions. Meanwhile, direct relationships can be cultivated between the rulers and the ruled. Social media thus represents a unique platform for political engagement […]" (Adundi 2017, 240). Adunbi emphasizes the use of social media in creating a direct relationship between *the rulers* and *the ruled*. Facebook therefore could have a direct effect on community-building, because the information is clearly controlled by the *ruled.* Volt's social media team or board member control the information and therefore, the "simultaneity", an important factor for the success of "print-capitalism", is present, in comparison to the lack of "simultaneity" with other digital media, as the WhatsApp group.

The second example of the Volt board trying to control the information flow is the Facebook livestream. This livestream would take place after each Volt NL television commercial. Prominent Volt members, often accompanied by less prominent members, would answer public questions. On May 7, 2019, Reinier and I went "live" for approximately 1,000 people. During this livestream, viewers typed their questions as a comment and Reinier and I would answer them all orally. This livestream is a new form of communication, it combines the way information being controlled by *ruler* and *ruled*.

Figure 6: Reinier (left) and me during a Volt Facebook livestream.

These examples illustrate the challenge Volt is trying to overcome. Volt sees the benefits of social media and is not afraid to use new forms of communication to reach an audience. For Volt, with its limited means, it is unavoidable to use social media and communication to reach a wide audience. However, sometimes, these digital communication forms can create an overflow of information or confusion. The challenge is to control these different forms of communication that it does not lead to confusion within the community.

Fixity of language

Language is an important form of a shared practice within a nation, or between people of a nation (Anderson 1983, 41, 85, 145). Anderson describes how the decline of Latin and the rise of national languages realized new ways of communication for citizens (142-4). Volt NL, as part of a pan-European organization, has been struggling with its language policy. The European Union does not have one official language, but Volt Europa has English established as their official language of communication. The following two examples illustrate the difficulty Volt NL has to shift between English and Dutch as their language of choice.

Firstly, the only time Volt members favored the choice of English over Dutch, was on May 9, when "Europe Day" facilitated a discussion about in what language the song would be performed in. The European Anthem has three versions: the original German, a Latin version and an English version. Volt members favored English for its accessibility to the performers as well the audience: "Well imagine us singing this in German or Latin. Apart from people not recognizing the song, when we sing it in English people will still hear and understand the words, you know."[13] In this case, English was chosen for its familiarity.

Apart from "Europe Day", Volt's language policy was very nation-oriented and the main language was therefore Dutch. "This is the point where I switch to Dutch"[14], the speaker at an event said often. The speaker would be in front of a crowd with multiple nationalities, but he or she would switch to Dutch after a few opening words in English. With the usage of Dutch, Volt members exclude non-Dutch speaking members from understanding the information during speeches and events. As a consequence, the group feeling would be perhaps stronger for Dutch speakers, but lower for non-Dutch speaking members. Identification to a certain group is linked to the language that is spoken (Blommaert 2006, 239 and Anderson 1983, 41). Of course, language also brings an opportunity to be "invited to the imagined community"

[13] Informal conversation, May 9 2019.
[14] Speech Laurens, March 9 2019.

(Anderson 1983, 145), when one would learn Dutch in this case. However, practically, the group identity of the Dutch speaking (so, mostly Dutch natives) is solidified, and the non-Dutch speaker, is left out.

Socio-political eminence

"Print-capitalism" created a new power dynamic in language (Anderson 1983, 45), as some languages (by printability) were used in prints and therefore, slowly dominated the information-flow. Some languages were favored for printing, and other languages, "their disadvantaged cousins, still assimilable to the emerging print-language, lost caste" (*ibidem*). In this point, Anderson demonstrates how the choice of one language, disadvantaged another. Anderson's argument is focused on printable languages. I am interested if Volt's choice of online communication, disadvantages the offline communication. If one language can overrule another, is this also applicable to communication forms? The online world seems the main place for Volters to communicate. However, it is not the *only* world in which they operate, as Volt NL has an office, it has many events throughout the Netherlands and has national congresses twice a year to vote on official topics. Can the online world overrule the offline world?

Volt members are used to combine online and offline communication. During my stay at the General Assembly in Rome, members of many Volt committees met each other for the first time. These committees have been functioning online for years, with no face-to-face meetings. Members from all over Europe met face-to-face and this was much appreciated. A physical (as opposed to virtual) meeting enriches the bond between two Volt members. I observed this clearly during the General Assembly, which re-energized many Volt NL members: "We already made history by coming together today, here in Rome. Look around you and remember *why* you are doing this."[14] Young adults can become more democratically active because of international experiences: "Rather, their critical awareness of inequality across borders and their intimate connections to multiple places deepened their perspectives on and their yearning for democratic citizenship" (Dyrness and Abu El-Haj 2019, 10). These person-to-person meetings between Volt members are very useful for strengthening their political and cultural community.

Scholars agree that "globalized" citizens often succeed in combining multiple communication forms. "Transborder citizens build on their social connections to form multiple systems of values, laws and familial practices, and to generate concepts and ways of relating to other people and the state that differ from those operative in any one of the states to which they

are linked" (Glick Schiller 2017, 52). The importance of offline communication for creating a community, is also stressed by Smith: "over time increasing communications created a mobile public for whom large-scale and often majestic landscapes and their associations came to play an ever more significant part in the forging of national unity and a sense of shared identity" (2009, 58). Smith argues that although international mass communication is now possible, a form of a "global culture" is still absent (*ibidem*, 121). Furthermore, a sense of national consciousness shows in different, yet often, physical activities: "in such diverse fields as politics, sport, travel and the news and weather reports" (73). Just like Anderson concludes regarding "print-capitalism", Smith agrees that the online world in itself is not enough for a strong, in his case national, sense of community. I think this also applies to Volt. There is a significant shift towards online communication, however, face-to-face meetings are also acknowledged as a vital part of strengthening the community.

Conclusion

On the one hand, modern means of digital communication such as "Zoom" or WhatApp bring many new chances for Volt members. People are able to connect to each other independent of location and sometimes, time (Ling 2008, 94). On the other hand, new forms of communication seem to fail in building a strong sense of community amongst participants. One of the reasons *how* and *why* people felt connected to their nation in Anderson's work is "print-capitalism": "a technology of communications (print), and the *fatality of human and linguistic diversity*" (1983, 43). The crucial difference is that today, the diversification of communication has grown exponentially. This chapter shows how different forms of communication, platforms as well as language, can create confusion amongst members. Volt members realize that physical communication has a vital part in building a sense of community. That is why Volt members organize international General Assemblies, national congresses, and numerous local events. Social, and online media have an evident role in today's community-building, however, for Volt, solely online communication is not enough. After explaining the challenge Volt had in strengthening a community, the next chapter outlines a final challenge Volt has in gaining popular support.

Chapter four - "YUP's"

"Okay, so the thing for me is, I get that Volt is successful in Amsterdam, or Paris, or just the big cities full of students and people who love to travel. The story is sexy for them: the EU is their playground, they might have done an Erasmus or an internship abroad. They work for big companies with international branches or business opportunities. But do you think people from, let's say, a tiny town in Poland or Italy are attracted to your story? Why would anyone vote for Volt, when you have bigger problems to worry about than climate change or taxation of multinationals? How are you going to make Volt attractive for those people?"

This question was asked by a man in the audience, during the Volt Fundraising dinner. His doubts, or critique, is central to the final challenge discussed in this thesis. Volters, themselves often identifying as cosmopolites and being aware of their privilege, struggle to find popular support for their political narrative, as most potential voters are not privileged the same way. Volters attempt to find answers to transnational problems in the European Union. However, this does not appeal to a voting public, who might be interested in different problems.

By comparing it to Anderson's notion on the role of "creole pioneers" in the "Americas", this chapter aims to understand Volt's cosmopolitan or elitist character. Anderson argues how "creole communities" developed "early conceptions of their nation-ness – *well before most of Europe*" (50). These so-called Anglo-American "creole pioneers" (people from European descent, born in the Americas) settled in the "New World colonies", now the United States of America, "formed and led by people who shared a common language and a common descent" (47). He provides multiple reasons for this: firstly, there were many economic opportunities (53) and secondly, the rise of liberalism and Enlightenment ideas (54). This chapter zooms in on the "creole pioneers" described by Anderson and translates those arguments to the position of Volt members. Could Volters turn out to be, like the "creole pioneers", perhaps, "cosmopolite pioneers" in the European Union – and if so, why? This chapter discusses cosmopolitanism as Volt's political friend and foe.

Creoles or cosmopolites – a world apart?

What is a "creole pioneer" and how can this be translated to today? Anderson defines a "creole" as a "person of (at least theoretically) pure European descent but born in the Americas (and, by

later extension, anywhere outside of Europe)" (1983, 47). These "creole pioneers", in the Nineteenth Century, distinguished themselves from Europeans – morally, and also politically (58) as *a new upper class*. This period also laid ground for new social division, as "the growth of creole communities, mainly in the Americas, but also in parts of Asia and Africa, led inevitably to the appearance of Eurasians, Eurafricans, as well as Euramericans, not as occasional curiosities but as visible social groups" (59). The "creole pioneers" used "print-capitalism" as a tool to spread information and political views. It was effective colonial administration that helped the "pioneers" to truly *imagine* their community (62).

Other definitions of "creole" and "creolization" also exist. Within anthropology, "creolization" is "[..] a process whereby new shared cultural forms, and new possibilities for communication, emerge owing to contact" (Eriksen 2016, 163). A "creole" as a mixed-race person is therefore an often-used example of the processes of "creolization". However, "creolization" faced much criticism within social studies, as, according to Eriksen; "[…] it is accused of being too wide and general—if every cultural process is creole in character, the term seems superfluous—and for implicitly positing the existence of pure forms existing prior to creolization" (171).

After discussing "creolization", how is "cosmopolitanism" defined and what do the concepts have in common? A cosmopolite can be understood as a "citizen of the world" (Derrida 2003, 8), but what does this mean precisely? Cosmopolitanism can be explained as the belief that one individual belongs to multiple groups, ranging from local to global (Pichler 2008, 1108). However, a difference is being made between cosmopolitanism as a *moral belief* and the creation and expansion of cosmopolite institutions (Pierik and Werner 2010, 3). Cosmopolitanism, resting on the three elements of individualism, all-inclusiveness and generality, is examined from an abstract, *moral* perspective (i*bidem*, 2). This perspective presents a moral belief that "all persons stand in certain moral relations to one another" (Pogge 1992, 49). Concluding, Anderson gives the "creole communities" an exclusive character and cosmopolitanism theoretically implies inclusivity.

However, the concepts do share commonalities. The "creoles" of the colonized world embraced a cosmopolitan view on the world: "their universal humanism was informed by their opposition to […] colonial exploitation" (Vergès 2001, 169). A crucial aspect about "creole cosmopolitanism" is thus, the post-colonial experience and the rejection of "nationalist absolutism" (169). For cosmopolites today, Zürn and de Wilde (2016) state: "We speak of the ideal type of cosmopolitanism as political ideology when claims that draw upon the arguments of globalists and universalists form to say: Yes to open borders, yes to global authorities, yes

to individualism and yes to individual rights as primary frame of justice". In this, there is a strong emphasis on individualism as opposed to a (post-)colonial experience. Cosmopolites often respond negatively to the nationalistic political tendencies such as Brexit (Appiah and Klein 2017).

So, can the community of Volt be identified as cosmopolite, and why? First and foremost, of course, Volt pleads for more international collaboration, more political power to the European Union as an institution and even, a federal Europe. Secondly, Volt members believe in individual human rights and the "primary frame of justice":

Waar staat Volt, zijn jullie links of rechts?
We proberen niet al te links of rechts te zijn, maar vooral **progressief**: we zijn mede opgericht door een mensenrechtenjuriste en **gelijke kansen** voor mannen en vrouwen, en etnische en seksuele minderheden zit diep in ons DNA. We zien vluchtelingen en migranten, en het milieu als kans om onze **levens** te **verbeteren**.

Figure 7: Screenshot of a WhatsApp message sent by a Volt NL member to the author, May 22 2019. Translation: Where does Volt stand, are you left or right? We are trying not to be either left nor right, but progressive: we are co-founded by a human rights lawyer and equal chances for men and women, and ethnical and sexual minorities is in our DNA. We see refugees and migrants and the environment as a chance to improve our lives.

As this message shows, Volt is co-founded by Colombe Cahen-Salvador, who has been the Policy Lead of Volt Europe. She, being the most significant theorist for Volt, emphasizes the belief in individual rights: "Universal human rights are the only thing we are sure of".[15] As far as the principle of "open borders" go, Volt pleads for more travel, through work and education in European Union (Volt 2018). This experience of open borders within the European Union is something many Volt members benefitted from. Most of my research participants lived or worked abroad. It is no coincidence that the founders of Volt met through the European Erasmus higher education exchange program.

Volt's struggle with Cosmopolitanism

Volt actually faces criticism because of their cosmopolite character. Volt was classified by a Belgium political opinion website as a "club for young entrepreneurs, managers and other higher educated, who advertise themselves as the "Erasmus generation" (Sanctorum 2018).

[15] Notes, April 11.

Being the "Erasmus generation" is confirmed, if not embraced, by Volters – as Andrea and Reinier both confirm in multiple interviews:

"Venzon beaamt: dit is de Erasmus-generatie, opgegroeid met het goede wat Europa te bieden heeft, die de politiek ingaat." *Translation: Venzon agrees: "This is the Erasmus generation, grown-up with all the good that Europe has to offer, going into politics."* (de Gruyter 2018).

"Ze vat deze groep jongeren samen onder de naam Erasmusgeneratie. Veel Volters studeerden dankzij een Erasmusbeurs van de Europese Unie een tijdje in een ander land; ze verruimden hun blik, leerden de zegeningen van de EU kennen. Nu is het *payback time*; Volt is hun manier om de Europese gedachte voor komende generaties veilig te stellen." *Translation: she summarizes this group of young adults with the name "Erasmus generation". A lot of Volters went to college abroad thanks to an Erasmus-grant of the European Union. Now it is 'payback time'; Volt is their way of insuring the European way of thinking for generations to come.* (Korteweg 2018)

"Ook de andere mensen van Volt – 'Volters', zeggen ze zelf – die elkaar in Utrecht treffen, zijn jong, ondernemend, hoogopgeleid en internationaal georiënteerd." *Translation: Also the other members of Volt, or "Volters" as they say, whom meet each other in Utrecht, are young, venturing, highly educated and internationally oriented.* (Korteweg 2018)

Volt would have an "elitist feeling upon them" (Sanctorum 2018), just as the "creole pioneers" are also classified as the "upper class" by Anderson (58). The "creole pioneers" benefitted from their elite position, as they had much financial and educational advantages. However, the same "elite" position seems to hinder Volt. Having an "elitist" reputation and that being a problem, is common for political parties. Although it is logical how the "elite" has the (financial) means to think about political change, it is important for a healthy democracy that citizens from all classes participate (McAllister 1991, 238). For Volt, overcoming an "elitist" image is crucial in gaining popular support.

Firstly, the "creole pioneers" had a "common language and descent", which was a significant factor in *imagining* their community – as it creates commonality. In Volt's case, perhaps the "common descent" is not nationality based, but it is based on moral values – highly educated, young, internationally oriented. However, their potential voting public might *not* share these values or background, which could create a gap. It might be because "the better educated, professional classes could be more likely to see themselves as cosmopolitans" (Pichler 2008, 1112) and the rest of the public might not be appealed by that same message. Moreover, research showed how "elites" often prioritize different political issues when

compared to the general voting public" (McAllister 1991, 239). But, apart from perhaps lack of "common descent", why would cosmopolitanism hinder Volt in their political efforts?

Secondly, as Zürn and the Wilde argue, for most people, the nation-state is the logical power institution to decide over rights and duties. "The state provides a context in which the members get in such a close relationship of rights and duties, that the state is the decisive context for justice" (2016). This means that political plans for trying to shift power, especially about individual rights and justice, from the nation to a European federation, might not appeal to the public. Today, the popularity of nationalism indicates a sharp contrast with the cosmopolite principles (Appiah and Klein 2017).

Thirdly, Volters noticed the lack of diversity in the party. They were afraid this would be a problem when trying to find popular support. "We need a more diverse group."[16] During a debating event, Volters expressed concerns about lack of diversity of gender and demography. Some thought a diverse group would be achieved through patience: "In the beginning there were many more males and "YUP's", which I also am. But if you really put in the effort, diversity works. The bigger we will get, the more diverse we will be."[17] Others, however, thought a more direct diversity strategy would help:

Figure 8: Screenshot from Volt Netherlands Facebook page, March 8 2019.

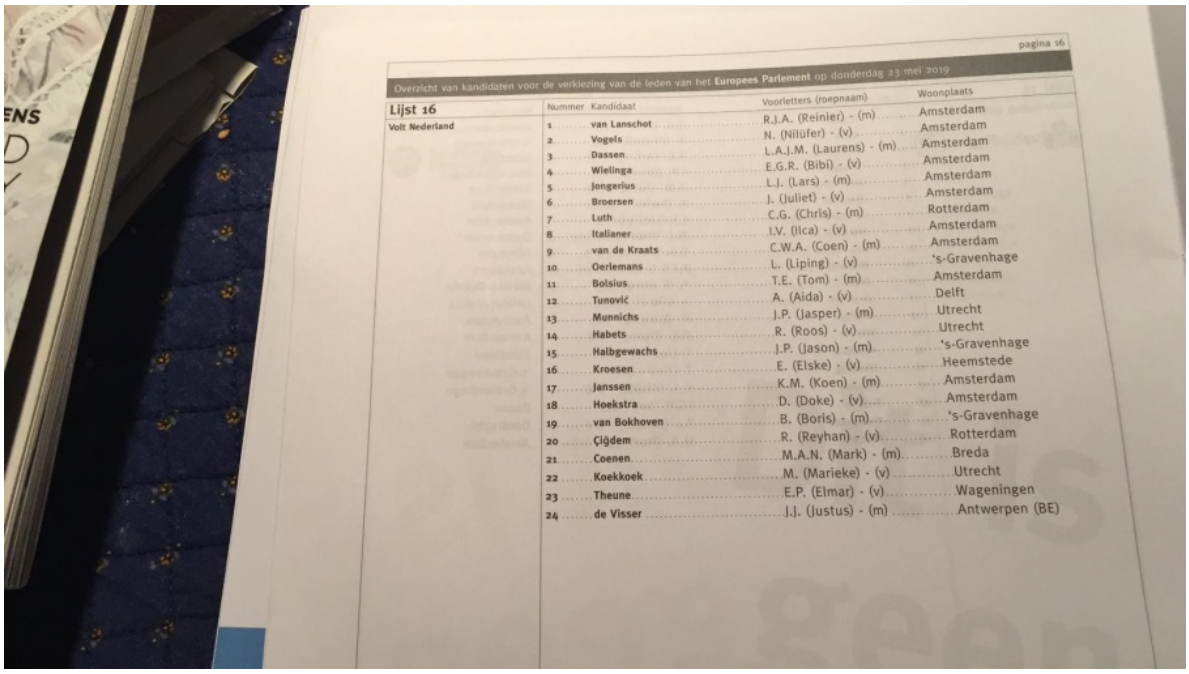
[16] Notes, March 28 2019.
[17] Notes, March 30 2019.

A Volter from Wageningen told me: “For me, it is very important that Volt has these policies. I feel like it is the only way to bridge the gap between men and women.” Their gender policies were a significant part of Volt’s political message during their campaign.

Finally, Volt struggled with demographic diversity. A strong urbanist ascendancy is also a characteristic of cosmopolitanism. Urban settings work particularly well for cosmopolites, as the urban space is often more global (Lozada 2006, 210). Therefore, this is shows another way in which Volt NL is bothered by their cosmopolite image. Also, for the “creole communities”, urbanism was an important factor of success, as “their populations were relatively tight linked by print as well as commerce (Anderson 1983, 64). However, this cosmopolite characteristic bothered Volters, and sometimes, it received backlash from the potential voting public as well:

Figure 9: Screenshot comment on Volt NL Facebook post. Retrieved: June 28, 2019. Translation: Sonny Spek: “But a lot of people from Amsterdam in the top 5. ;-)”. Volt NL: “Hey, Sonny Spek, you’re right! In the beginning, we mostly expanded in the bigger cities and Groningen. But, we are becoming more diverse and everybody is welcome with us. It is going the right way luckily!”

Although for cosmopolites it is logical to settle in an urban space, this also hindered them in trying to appeal to a larger audience.



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Overzicht van kandidaten voor de verkiezing van de leden van het **Europees Parlement** op donderdag 23 mei 2019

Lijst 16
Volt Nederland

Nummer	Kandidaat	Voorletters (roepnaam)	Woonplaats
1	van Lanschot	R.J.A. (Reinier) - (m)	Amsterdam
2	Vogels	N. (Nilüfer) - (v)	Amsterdam
3	Dassen	L.A.J.M. (Laurens) - (m)	Amsterdam
4	Wielinga	E.G.R. (Bibi) - (v)	Amsterdam
5	Jongerius	L.J. (Lars) - (m)	Amsterdam
6	Broersen	J. (Juliet) - (v)	Amsterdam
7	Luth	C.G. (Chris) - (m)	Rotterdam
8	Italianer	I.V. (Ilca) - (v)	Amsterdam
9	van de Kraats	C.W.A. (Coen) - (m)	Amsterdam
10	Oerlemans	L. (Liping) - (v)	's-Gravenhage
11	Bolsius	T.E. (Tom) - (m)	Amsterdam
12	Tunović	A. (Aida) - (v)	Delft
13	Munnichs	J.P. (Jasper) - (m)	Utrecht
14	Habets	R. (Roos) - (v)	Utrecht
15	Halbgewachs	J.P. (Jason) - (m)	's-Gravenhage
16	Kroesen	E. (Elske) - (v)	Heemstede
17	Janssen	K.M. (Koen) - (m)	Amsterdam
18	Hoekstra	D. (Doke) - (v)	Amsterdam
19	van Bokhoven	B. (Boris) - (m)	's-Gravenhage
20	Çiğdem	R. (Reyhan) - (v)	Rotterdam
21	Coenen	M.A.N. (Mark) - (m)	Breda
22	Koekkoek	M. (Marieke) - (v)	Utrecht
23	Theune	E.P. (Elmar) - (v)	Wageningen
24	de Visser	J.J. (Justus) - (m)	Antwerpen (BE)

Figure 10: Picture, made by author, of Volt NL's candidate list. May 23, 2019. It shows the Volt candidates and their places of residences.

It is clear that Volt NL has difficulty transcending inclusivity and accessibility to their voting public. This is common for political parties, as "[a]ll around us, the winners in our highly inequitable status quo declare themselves partisans of change. They know the problem, and they want to be part of the solution. Actually, they want to lead the search for solutions" (Lane 2019). It is often the "elite" who have the means to fight for social change: "Elites have the power, the organization, and the desire to shape and change society towards structures and beliefs beneficial to their interests" (Pryor 2013, 49). However, "their interests" suggests that "elites" are fighting in interest of their own socio-political position. Volt members truly seem to want to change the world for the better:

"I do not want to look back and have to say to my grandchildren: while the world was burning, I did nothing. Emphasizing what unites Europeans rather than playing the game of those national elites who - for their own purposes - pit nations against each other: the interests of Europeans align more often across nations than what some make us believe".[18]

Many Volters have expressed the feeling that they *have* to come into action. This is also typical for cosmopolites. "If we really do believe that all human beings are created equal and endowed with certain inalienable rights, we are morally required to think about what that conception requires us to do with and for the rest of the world" (Nussbaum 1994, 5). In their efforts, Volt

[18] Notes, General Assembly, March 21 2019.

members seem to be hindered by their own reputation sometimes, making them, not yet, the successful "pioneers" they aim to become.

Conclusion

In their efforts of gaining popular support, Volt NL members faced another challenge. Many Volt members represent a certain cosmopolitan "elite", as they are highly educated with a lot of international experience. Although for Anderson's "imagined communities", the elitist "creole pioneers" were crucial in creating a sense of community, for Volt NL, this image hinders them. Volters realize how this image is problematic because they perceive themselves as fighting to improve the lives of all EU citizens. In an effort to overcome this challenge, Volt has adopted different diversity strategies to attract members with various backgrounds, but most of them have not been successful yet. Just as familiarity with symbols, diversification of membership of a political party is something that may take time.

Conclusion – "This is only the beginning"[19]

Through this ethnographic research, I aimed to understand the challenges that Volt NL members faced at a criterial period, the campaign towards the 2019 European Parliament elections. I sought to improve my understanding through the theoretical framework of Benedict Anderson regarding people's connection to the nation. Volt aims to change the European Union and thus, needs massive popular support. I identified three crucial challenges for Volt NL members: using European symbols, dealing with modern communication and overcoming an "elitist" image. The broader implication of my work could be that Volt NL might be more successful in their next campaign, if they overcome these challenges.

Firstly, symbols such as the European anthem or a Volt flag can be helpful in creating a feeling of "imagined community". However, a certain level of familiarity is necessary for these symbols to function and this is lacking, for now, for Volt as well as EU symbols. Also, especially for Volt symbols, a certain "context" is lacking, which causes a lack of response. Possibly, this may improve in the future, as consistent exposure to symbols improves recognition. Symbols need to be combined with other forms of communication, where the next challenge for Volt lies.

When compared to "print-capitalism", modern forms of communication are more complex. Instead of information flow, with a clear *ruler* and *ruled, Volt* used many different forms of communication. I noticed that this caused confusion amongst Volt members. On the one hand, the use of virtual communication was considered the obvious choice for committee meetings. On the other hand, it was very meaningful when people actually met. It is unavoidable in a "pan-European" organization that communication is online. However, Volt NL could perhaps benefit to increase the number of physical meetings. Perhaps this is a pitfall typical for a young, modern organization with members who are used to communicate online. Also, a more consistent use of one of the main languages in Europe, English, might be helpful to non-Dutch speakers in the Netherlands (who are potential Volt supporters) to be able to join.

Finally, Volt struggles with an "cosmopolite" or "elitist" image. Many members are highly educated, living in the major cities in Europe and have a lot of international experience. I noted how Volt members are aware of this image and aim to change this through various diversity programs. Volt NL members have a very strong determination to change the European

[19] Speech Reinier after election result, May 23 2019.

Union for everyone, not just for the "elite". They realize that they need to overcome this image and become more diverse in order to appeal to a wider audience.

Reflecting on my role as an anthropologist in the research group, I realize that for me it was relatively easy to "blend in" as I have roughly the same background as many Volters. My role was complex, as partly participant and partly observer, most Volters were willing to accept and even help me with my work. Perhaps this points to the fact that this group is highly educated and open to theoretical discussions. I can imagine that for other potential members it can be quite overwhelming to join this group. This may hamper their ambition to overcome their elitist image. According to my research group, I was the first anthropologist to do ethnographic fieldwork amongst them. However, I can imagine how anthropologists with different backgrounds would have felt differently in this group. Possibly, future anthropologists will come to different observations or conclusions. An inherent limitation is that the fieldwork is a subjective analysis and in part, influenced by who I am and my views.

In today's society, elements of Anderson's work might not be as applicable, as he focuses on nation-building in the previous centuries. It should be noted that the European Union lacks "shared history", current communication differs crucially from the days of "print-capitalism" and the role of the "elite" is perceived differently by the public. A reason for this discrepancy could be because "nation-ness" is "ever-changing" and the criteria for a community might have changed. Also, the European Union is in a process of "change" – as even its changing memberships show.

The future of Volt Europa is uncertain. On the one hand, Volt received a seat in the European Parliament and joined the EFA Green group as Volt. The elected Volt member of parliament, Damian Boeselager, is able to represent Volters throughout Europe. On the other hand, Volt is aware that one seat does not provide much influence and the political road ahead is long. Volters have to find a way to unite Europeans, in a time when nationalist parties with opposite agendas are more popular than ever. Gaining popular support for the European Union is the biggest challenge Volt NL and Europe have to overcome.

I realize my research took place in a pioneering phase, but also the beginning of Volt's history. There is much room for (anthropological) research in the future. Volt NL is preparing for the 2021 national elections. Also, it would be interesting for anthropologists to do ethnographic fieldwork in different countries and compare their work.

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