'Linkse ratten, rol uw matten!'
The dramatization of collective identity by new radical right youth movements in a context Flemish-nationalism

David Leenstra
5551919
Utrecht University
2 August 2019

A Thesis submitted to the Board of Examiners
in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Master of Arts in Conflict Studies & Human Rights

Utrecht University

Supervision: Dr. Luuk Slooter

Date of submission: 2 August 2019

Program trajectory: Research Project (15 ECTS) & Thesis writing (15 ECTS)

Word count: 24796

Cover image: '*Vlaamse vlag'.* Retrieved from the Flemish Parliament under the Free Open

Data License Flanders v.1.2 https://www.vlaamsparlement.be/dossiers/vlaamse-symbolen

Abstract
Radical right-wing youth movements are becoming increasingly popular throughout
Europe. Inspired by the Alternative-Right in the United States and the *Nouvelle Droite*
from France, these organizations aim move away from the party political, and focus on the
preserving cultural and identitarian aspects of society. This ethnographic case-study zooms
in on three far-right Flemish-nationalist youth movements in Belgium and explores the
motivations of members to join these movements and the diversity of beliefs and ideas that
are present among them. It attempts to answer the question how different meanings and
perceptions of Flemish identity are performed and reinforced in the contentious repertoire
of the new-flamingant radical right. By combining a dramaturgical approach with
collective identity theories, this research presents an image of the diverse conceptions of
Flemish identity and other social identity groups that are experienced by members and
leaders of these organizations. Additionally, it maps the contentious repertoire these
movements make use of to communicate their messages to the public. Hence, it shows how
and what different perceptions of Flemish identity are performed and crystallized in the
digital and physical environments.

Keywords: Far-right, dramaturgy, collective identity, Flemish-nationalism, ethnography

Table of contents

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

KVHV - Katholiek Vlaams Hoogstudentenverbond (Catholic Flemish Student Movement)

NSV!   - Nationalistische Studentenvereniging (Nationalist Students' Association)

N-VA   - Nieuwe-Vlaamse Alliantie (New-Flemish Alliance)

S&V   - Schild & Vrienden

VB   - Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest)

VRT   - Vlaamse Radio- en Televisieomroeporganisatie
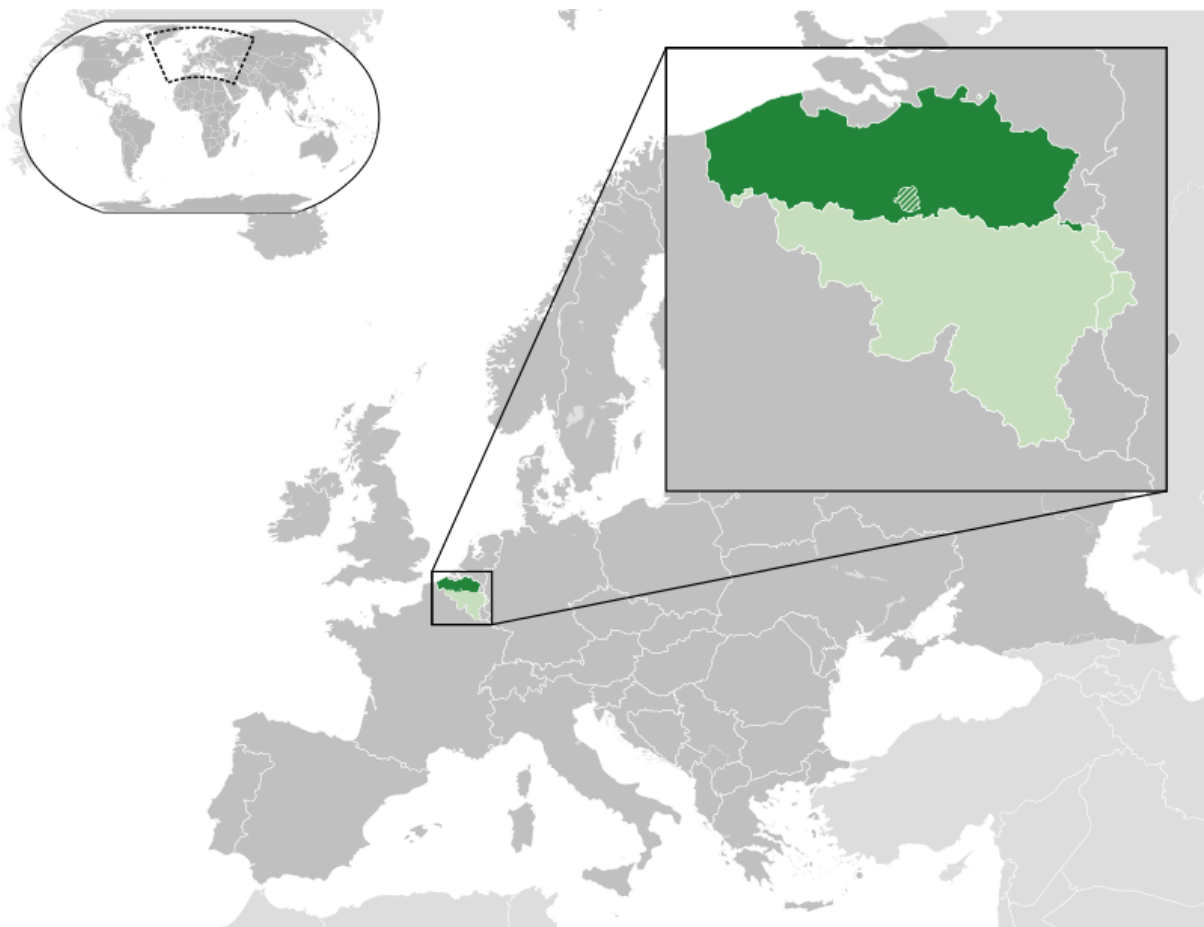
Map of Flanders in Europe

Figure 1. Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia. (28 July 2013). *Flemish community in Belgium and Europe*.

Introduction

On 16 December 2018 over seven thousand people joined the March against Marrakesh through the streets of Brussels. This march was organized to protest against the UN Global Compact for Migration, signed in Marrakesh, which would, according to opposers, give immigrants and refugees a stronger legal base to settle in European countries after entering Europe. The march was organized by several flamingant organizations that are part of the *Vlaamse Beweging* (Flemish movement), an overarching name for individuals and organizations that aim to improve the position of Flanders and Flemish culture. The March was initiated by the *Katholiek Vlaams Hoogstudentenverbond* (KVHV), a Flemish-nationalist, catholic student association. They were supported in the organization by other Flemish-nationalist youth movements, among which the *Nationalistische Studentenvereniging* (NSV!)*,* which is also organized the principles of Flemish-nationalism and conservatism. Most significantly, the march was co-organized by *Schild & Vrienden*. While KVHV and NSV! are both student associations and have existed for decades, the latter exists since 2017. It describes itself as a metapolitical Flemish-nationalist youth movement, which goal is to promote active citizenship among the Flemish youth. It is the youngest and most visible part of the Flemish movement, primarily due to its dominant online presence. The movement seems to achieve a resurgence of flamingantism amongst a significant part of the Flemish youth.[1]

Throughout Europe, similar identitarian movements have become increasingly popular among young people. Organizations as the French *Generation Identitaire,* the Austrian and German *Identitäre Bewegung,* Generation Identity in the United Kingdom and Ireland, *Identitair Verzet* in the Netherlands all characterize a new wave of right-wing activism. They are associated with the far-right, attract a significant number of young people and they primarily combine physical acts of protest with an enhanced social media campaign, reaching millions of people. While Schild & Vrienden is not an official branch of Generation Identity, it can definitely be considered part of the identitarians. The organization sparked nationwide controversy after a report by the Flemish national broadcasting network VRT

---

[1] Flamigantism refers to the support for Flemish movement, and thus the emancipation of the Flemish nation.

aired in September 2018. It portrayed the movement's members as racist, sexist and violent, based on six months access inside a private chat group of the movement. According to the reporter, the messages that were sent across predominantly included thousands of violent, racist, anti-semitic and sexist messages and 'memes'.[2] After the documentary, the movement was condemned by political parties -all but the far-right *Vlaams Belang* (Flemish Interest)-civil society organizations, news media and universities. Police and judicial investigations commenced and houses of several members of the movement were searched.

The social relevance of the above described is unmistakable. First, the march illustrates the wider far-right wing sentiment that is present in Flanders, but also throughout different nation-states in Europe and many other countries in the world. The popularity of the Flemish far-right was confirmed during the elections on 26 May 2019, after the Flemish-nationalist party Flemish Interest won on all electoral levels: European, national and Flemish, respectively winning 12, 12, and 18,5 percent of the people's votes. Schild & Vrienden leader Dries Van Langenhove - who was placed on the list of Flemish Interest, but stayed independent - received forty thousand preference votes in the province he ran in. Secondly, the significance of the social movement Schild & Vrienden in the organization of this march and its dominant position in promoting the Flemish movement illustrates a wide European trend of new-right wing nationalism among teenagers and young adults. Thirdly, the march illustrates contemporary forms of protest, in which different organizations work together to make an appeal on a broader public, in which social media is of significant importance. While protest marches may belong to one of the older forms of protest, the digital component enabling the large masses to mobilize is characteristic to the last decade of the 21st century.

The research is embedded within the field of social movement theory. Viewing these organizations in the light of the interdisciplinary field enables researchers to get a better understanding of, and a comprehensive insight into how these movements are organized, how they make claims, what their ideologies consist of, how they overlap, how they differ from each and how they construct and shape identities. This research attempts to answer the following question:

---

[2] Memes can be defined as ('a) a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance, which (b) were created with awareness of each other, and (c) were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users' (Shifman 2014, 41).

How are different meanings and perceptions of Flemish identity performed and reinforced in the contentious repertoire of the new-flamingant radical right?

In order to formulate a satisfying answer, the following sub-questions will be answered: What organizations does the new-flamingant radical right consist of? What meanings and beliefs of Flemishness do members of Flemish radical right-wing youth movements carry? What array of claim-making performances are employed by the new-flamingant radical right? And finally, how are collective identities expressed in cultural materials during public performances?

To formulate an answer to these questions, analytical tools from two bodies of literature will be used. First, the conceptions relating to identity will be mapped and analysed using collective and social identity theory. The repertoire of the movements will be mapped using a performance theory, focusing on the how and what meaning is displayed by social actors and movements. Jeffrey Alexander's (2006) cultural performances framework forms the foundation. Studying social protest from a dramaturgical perspective allows us to connect contentious acts to the process of identity formation and construction on the individual, organizational and interorganizational levels. This multilevel analysis of cultural performances helps to distinguish different perceptions and senses of identity. The approach enables to cover some essential questions that are at the foundation of this research, such as: what organizations are responsible for the occurrence of the march and how do these interrelate? Why do individuals engage in far-right wing activism? What ideologies do these groups commit to and how do these differ and overlap among members of the organizations?

This research has three main goals: the first empirical goal is to interpret a cultural significant phenomenon, namely the popularity of the far-right in Flanders. A second empirical goal is exploring diversity, by zooming in on different organizations and its individual members of organizations that can be considered part of the far-right. A third goal, theoretical in nature, is that it hopes to refine theory, by bringing together contentious politics, dramaturgy and identity construction processes within social movement theory providing future researchers with a multifaceted approach towards linking individual perceptions and beliefs to the broader contentious repertoires of social movements.

While the far-right is increasing in popularity across the European continent, in-depth research on far-right wing supporters and organizations is relatively scarce. Numerous political analyses of established far-right parties in the political arena have been done. In that respect, political scientist Cas Mudde (2000; 2004; 2007) can be considered one of the most influential scholars within the far-right studies domain, successfully researching the popularity and ideologies of the radical-right for several decades. Christina Liang (2007) and her co-authors provide a comprehensive overview of policy-making by far-right parties in different European countries. Jorgen Rydgren (2008) conducted a quantitative analysis on popular motivations to vote for radical right-wing parties. These and many other comparative or individual case studies on the party-political radical-right illustrate the increasing popularity of the far-right (for example Art 2011; Arzheimer 2006; Betz 1994; Fekete 2008).

In social movement research relatively little attention has been paid to far-right wing socio-political organizations. And when far-right wing organizations are the subject of research, the perspective of the participant is often left out. Illustrative for the lack of participant observation and in-depth interviews with participants in far-right movement research is the special issue of *German Politics and society,* about the German anti-Islam movement Pegida, edited by Helga Druxes and Patricia Simpson (2016). In the six chapter long issue, the chapters respectively address the movement's discursive strategies, appearance of online identities, the ideology, the position within Europe, responses of Muslims to Pegida, and the movements role in politics (Druxes and Simpson 2016). While all of these studies are valuable contributions to get insight in the movement, it lacks first hand interviews with members of the movement. I deem the perspective, views and beliefs of the participants essential components that help to understand what an organization like Pegida is really about. Kathleen Blee already identified this lack of ethnographic research to the far-right in her introducing chapter of the issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* about the far- right (Blee 2007: 119). This issue contains several ethnographic accounts of different far-right wing groups. Blee justly remarks that studies on the far-right are predominantly written from an outsider's perspective, and rarely based on internal insights from within the movements, generally because it is difficult for academics to get in touch with far-right supporters (Blee 2007: 121). The special issue, edited by Blee is aimed at filling that gap (2007: 124) Altogether, the different studies in the volume issue have great value for understanding the diversity of the far-right and in gaining insight in the different

ways the far-right takes shape, but I want to bring to attention some aspects that are overlooked.

First of all, in many news outlets and in a large part of academic literature, these kind of movements are often categorized under the same label, for example as extreme, violent, racist, fascist, sexist. For Blee's introductory chapter, two of the five key words are 'racism' and 'organized racism' (Blee 2007: 119). The abstract of her chapter mentions far-right and racist groups, but later drops out the distinction between racist and far-rights, treating them as one category. I would argue that approaching these groups as racist and labelling them as such, does not contribute to gaining insight within the groups, because for one, racism as a label appears to implicate a moral judgement, and secondly, because it is generalizing: far-right wing supporters are not racists per definition. While this research will show that most of the interviewees have unconventional perceptions about certain politically charged topics such as immigration, nationalism or identity, defining them in one or more of the aforementioned labels does not contribute to gaining an understanding of their actual ideas, perceptions, strategies, methods of protest, et cetera. While I want to emphasize that I do not want to downplay the fact that racist sentiments and ideas are widespread among supporters of the far-right, I consider it important to problematize, question and map the variety of sentiments and ideas in sufficient detail among young Flemish-nationalists.

Secondly, both the accounts of German neo-nazi's and French *National Front* supporters are based on the interpretation of observations of the researcher, without consulting actual supporters of these movement (Virchow 2007; Berezin 2007). Ethnographic accounts solely based on observation are not necessarily unfit or incomplete, but by leaving out the meanings and beliefs of the individuals which the ethnographic work is about, an opportunity is missed. Especially in interpretative accounts, moving from observation to interpretation without incorporating the beliefs of the studied social group creates a less strong ethnographic account. After all, the subsequent danger is that certain symbols, speeches, acts, meanings and so on are differently- or even misinterpreted and translated by the researcher. It is for this reason that observation combined with in-depth interviewing is more more valuable for research. The opposite, then, must ideally also be avoided. The life histories of ex-nazi's in Sweden discussed by Kimmel (2007) and extreme-right activists in the Netherlands discussed by Linden and Klandermans (2007) may give important insights into motivations and histories of (former) far-right supporters, but without observations one

may question the legitimacy of the answers given and whether these correspond with their actions. Not having this integrated perspective might lead to missing possible discrepancies between words and deeds. This research will combine these different aspects.

Finally, by incorporating studies on National Front supporters, Dutch right-wing activists, Scandinavian ex-nazi's and German neo-nazi's in the same journal issue under the combined header of 'far-right', these supporters are placed under the same umbrella, potentially resulting in the unintentional implication that French *Front National* supporters and neo-nazi's in Germany or Scandinavia have similar political and societal views. A definition or discussion of the far-right concept in her introductory chapter could have provided some clarity of why the studied groups are considered part of the far-right umbrella. An issue titled 'Ethnography of the Far-Right' can, in my opinion, not omit a paragraph about the definition of the subject of the study.

Due to the aforementioned hiatus of a clear definition, one may find oneself overwhelmed by all the different terms to address ideologies that are generally found on the far right side of the political spectrum. Do we speak about the far, radical, extreme, nationalist or populist right? Different authors have pointed to this 'terminological chaos' and to the 'bewildering array' of parties (Mudde 2007: 12; Fekete 2018: 14).[3] Most of the conceptualizations of the far-right in the literature focuses on political parties, not on social movements. In his comprehensive overview of far-right characteristics, Matt Golder (2016) lists the most important characteristics of far-right political parties in Europe. First, they are radical or extreme, in the sense that - at least - they struggle for a radical change in society. The former advocates for a radical change of the political system, whereas the latter is anti-democratic and wants to get rid of the democratic system (478). Secondly, their politics are focused on nationalism, either along state borders or ethnic groups (480). Thirdly, they are populist, meaning they identify a clear dichotomy between the 'pure people' and a 'corrupt elite' (479). The movements in this research are not anti-democratic per se, thus radicalism will be adopted to address them. Swedish sociologist Jens Rydgren (2007) identifies what he calls the new-radical right. According to him, the new-radical right emphasizes ethno-nationalism

---

[3] For an elaborate overview and discussion of this terminology Cas Muddes work is highly suggested. Both his books Ideology of the Extreme Right (2000) and The Populist-Radical Right (2016) contain excellent chapters in which the terminology about the far-, extreme-, radical-, populist-right is discussed and problematized.

rooted in myths about the distant past. Primary foci of these movements are the emancipation and strengthening of the nation, by steering to traditional values and ethnic homogeneity. The nation is often put ahead of individual rights and elites generally blamed for their internationalist political direction and their self-enrichment, at the expense of the rest of the population (Rydgren 2007: 242). Broadly speaking, the movements fit this definition to different extents. Furthermore, an essential component in the new-radical right as I define it, is the influence of the *Nouvelle Droite,* or the New Right. At the center of this ideological movement is the strategy of 'metapolitics', introduced by thinkers as Alain de Benoist (2000), who criticized modernity and liberalism (4). It moves away from the focus on the political, to the cultural, strongly emphasizing the historicity of culture and identity, and its importance for existence. It is also this line of thought which will appear to be highly influential in the movements' ideologies.

Belgium is no exception: research has been done on the far right-wing in Flanders, primarily studying party programmes, ideologies and origins of the Flemish-nationalist party New Flemish Alliance *N-VA* and the more radical *Flemish Interest* (e.g. Erk: 2005; Art: 2008; Swyngedouw and Ivaldi: 2001). A research gap can be identified in the academic literature far right-wing social movements in Flanders. Naturally, some research has been done to the Flemish movement, but rarely in ethnographic form, let alone based on in-depth interviews, these works have been primarily historical.[4]

One of the very few case studies can be found in the extensive work on the far-right is Klandermans and Mayer's (2006) *Extreme-right activism in Europe: through the magnifying glass.* This transnational study on far-right wing activism was conducted by different researchers in multiple European countries using the same questionnaire, focussing on three main questions: 'Who are they, Why do they join and Why do they stay?' (2006). For his contribution about extreme right-wing activism in Flanders, Hans de Witte interviewed eleven members of *Vlaams Blok* (currently Flemish Interest), nine from the nationalist group Voorpost, and eight from NSV! (Klandermans & Mayer 129: 2006). The main finding of the research was that right-wing activism was primarily motivated by ethno-nationalism. This

---

[4] For it is beyond the scope of this research to incorporate further elaboration on the Flemish movement, I recommend reading Lode Wils' *Van de Belgische naar de Vlaamse natie: Een geschiedenis van de Vlaamse Beweging* (2005) or Hermans' extensive *The Flemish Movement: A Documentary History 1780 - 1990* (2015) for the non-Dutch speaking.

research implicitly tests whether this thesis still applies. The ages of his participants range between 18 and 54, whereas my research focuses on a more narrow age range. By doing so, it enables the findings of the research to reflect a particular *Zeitgeist*. Consequently, it almost eliminates difference in age as variable influencing someone's perceptions and beliefs. While this research incorporates the main motivations for members to join the radical-right, the focal points are showing diverse beliefs and perceptions of movement members, focusing on their interpretation of Flemish-nationalism, and the ways they define their social identities. Besides, it maps how these identities are enacted in acts of protest.

The first chapter will elaborate on the methodological choices made in order to conduct this research. The second chapter will map out the theoretical framework and the theoretical field this work is embedded in. The third chapter will contain an analysis of the social identity groups which are distinguished by the interviewees of this research. First, it will provide a brief descriptive account of the movement's studied, with a focus on the main ideologies and orientations of the movements and the main similarities and differences among the members. Then, it will provide a an analysis of the conceptions and beliefs of individual participants surrounding Flemish identity. In the fourth chapter, the contentious repertoire of the new-right will be mapped. At the same time, some claim-making performances are viewed dramaturgical perspective in order to bring forward how perceptions of primarily Flemish identity are reified and come to live in the physical and digital world.

Chapter 1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework presents the analytical lens through which the phenomenon will be viewed. It will include multiple concepts which serve as the building blocks for the research. It makes sure the research is theoretically informed. We need analytic frames to break down a phenomenon -the new-radical right youth movements in Flanders- into their constituent parts and studying them in relation to each other and the whole (Ragin and Amaroso 2011: 55). In other words, frames both help to structure and make sense of the raw data. To do so, this research will draw on two different bodies of literature, presenting a framework that incorporates both collective identity theory and performance theory. First, some general trends in the social movement studies field are discussed.

1.1 Defining the field

Structural approaches in social movement and mobilization theory have for a long time dominated the field. For example, McCarthy and Zald's (1977) resource mobilization approach to studying social movements looks primarily at structural components of social life, focusing on the capability and efforts of social movements to use different kinds of resources in order to successfully mobilize adherents. One of the most influential authors is Charles Tilly, who has become famous for his macro-historical studies on political violence, state making and social movements (Tilly 2003; 2017; 2019). Since its introduction in 1977, his framework of contentious politics has served as one of the most dominant ways to studying social movements, civil war and other forms of organized political protest (1977; Tarrow in Della Porta 2013). Contentious politics can be summarized as 'collective political struggle' (Tarrow and Tilly 2007: 4). More specifically, it involves actors making claims using public performances, by drawing on existing repertoires, and potentially adding new forms of collective action. They forge alliances with influential members of their polities and take advantage of existing opportunities and create opportunities for themselves, using both institutional and extrainstutional routines to support their claims (Tilly and Tarrow 2015: 7). It has provided researchers with an overarching framework to study social protest regardless

of time and place. It is one of the foundations for this research's analytic frame. It departs from the idea that contentious groups make use of certain repertoires, 'like troopes of street musicians' (Tilly 2008: xiii). The 'repertoires' metaphor stems from Tilly's early work on popular protest in France, after which it became a widely adopted concept within social movement theory (1977). Tilly's approach to studying collective action has always been macro-historical, even though ontologically he moved from being a structuralist in what he called a relational realist, assuming social interaction forms 'the central stuff in social life' (2008: 7). This emphasis on relational interactions in social movement studies has also become more dominant over the years, for example in Mario Diani's (1992) work in which he conceptualizes social movements in terms informal interactions between a plurality of individuals or groups. Similarly, Alberto Melucci's (1995) work on identity by social movements assumes this human interaction is central in collective identity construction. Thus, since a few decades, scholars have given more and more attention to the importance of meaning and meaning-making in social movement research, moving away from structural approaches. This so-called 'cultural turn' in social sciences involves 'ways in which movements have used symbols, language, discourse, identity, and other dimensions of culture to recruit, retain, mobilize, and motivate members (Williams 2007: 93). One of the most important examples are Benford and Snow's (1988; 1992; 2000; 2004) works on framing by social movements, which alone has evolved into an significant body of literature.[5]

This research is embedded within this cultural turn, but rather than focusing only on words, it will make use of a dramaturgical approach to collective action, combined with a focus on collective identity in order to show bridges the gap between meaning and structure, because it assumes that actors are situated within certain meaning systems and a cultural environment, which they pragmatically use, as a toolkit, to create a convincing narrative that can be enacted, having implications for members' conceptions of identity. The latter will now be our starting point.

---

[5] The notion of framing is an important part and a helpful tool to understand meaning-generating practices, but will not be further addressed in this review. Benford and Snow influential work provides an excellent overview of the literature on framing practices by social movements (2000).

1.2 Collective Identity

Numerous studies have been done to the role of collective identity in social movement research. This chapter assesses some of the key conceptualizations of the concept, after which it must become how collective identity will be viewed in this research.

Collective identity can both be viewed as a 'product' and a 'process'. Collective identity as a process revolves mainly around how individuals view themselves as part of a larger entity. To understand this process, Maykel Verkuyten's conception of social identity is a solid starting point: 'social identity is about the relationship between the individual and the environment. [...] The emphasis is not on what makes a person unique, but on similarities to some and differences from others' (Verkuyten 2005: 42). So having a social identity enables people to refer to themselves as part of a larger entity, a social group (Yildiz and Verkuyten 2011: 248). Thus, it is about the part of an individual's identity that derives from the sense of belonging to a group (Tajfel 1981, 69).

Fearon and Laitin's notion of social categories helps to better understand what group identities are made of (2000). According to them, social categories are

> sets of people given a label (or labels) and distinguished by two main features: (1) rules of membership that decide who is and is not a member of the category; and (2) content, that is, sets of characteristics (such as beliefs, desires, moral commitments, and physical attributes) thought to be typical of members of the category, or behaviors expected or obliged of members in certain situations (roles).
>
> (Fearon and Laitin 2000: 848).

Thus, as Verkuyten (2005) states, 'the membership of the social category *is* someone's social identity', that is, the part of his identity that derives from being part of a group (43). The process of social categorization creates and defines the individual's own place in society (Tajfel 1981, 69). In relation to social movement research Polletta and Jasper have defined this process of collective identity as

as an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution. It is a perception of a shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly, and it is distinct from personal identities, although it may form part of a personal identity. [...] Collective identities are expressed in cultural materials—names, narratives, symbols, verbal styles, rituals, clothing, and so on.   (2001: 285).

In this process of identity formation, scholars agree that boundary work is an essential element. It is about 'creating a reciprocal identification between group members that simultaneously express commonalities and difference with reference groups (Fominaya 2010: 395). In this regard, Lamont and Molnár (2002) discuss symbolic boundaries, that are used by groups and individuals to define their own group and reinforce collective identities. At the core of this boundary work is the emphasis on the distinctions between in- and outgroups, between 'us' and 'them' (Lamont 2002: 169-70). Yildiz and Verkuyten also stress the importance of creating this dichotomy, while at the same time they add an important complement: it is important that it is defined how the outgroup affects the ingroup, thus how 'they' affect 'us'. Herein, if the own social identity group is under threat, people are more willing to take action (Yildiz and Verkuyten 2011: 250). The social identity approach Yildiz and Verkuyten adopt is discursive in nature, focused on narratives that are communicated in the media landscape and how these stories contribute to a shared group identity. These narratives make up an important part of how individuals are fused into collectives.

Melucci (1995) agrees that narratives are a part of the collective identity process: he focuses more on the cultural dimensions of collective identity. Ontologically, he views collective identity as a tool that helps to cover the dualism between structure and meaning, by focusing on the processes of relational interactions (Melucci 1995: 42). After all, 'social movements develop collective identity in a circular relationship with a system of opportunities and constraints' (1995: 47). So both cultural context as how this context is used are important parts of the construction collectives., The collective identity is not a 'thing', rather it is a system of relations and interpretations (Melucci 1995: 50). Melucci helps to understand what one can get out of studying collective identities. He argues that contemporary movements often take the shape of solidarity networks, distinguishing them from formal organizations. While in the case of this research formal organizations are

studied, an evident Flemish-nationalist collective identity is also present, overarching the different movements. Furthermore, 'the notion of collective identity can help to describe and to explain the connection between the apparent unity, which is always our empirical starting point, and the underlying multiplicity' (Melucci 1995: 53). Thus, researching identities can help us to make sense of the multilayeredness of social movements and analysing what links and what distinguishes individual members.

Collective identity as a product refers to the key ideologies, orientations and goals of the movement. It can be understood more as the pre-packed toolbox, the main ideologies, goals and orientations that are used by movements to recruit members or explain their cause, for example (Fominaya 2010, 397). In other words, it is more about the direct causes and beliefs, but also concrete rules of membership that the social movement imposes, rather than the sense of belonging to the group of the individual. This 'product' type of collective identity will mainly be used to outline the different movements in chapter three.

The second section of chapter three builts on the 'process' definition of collective identity, focusing on the interpretations of members of their collective social identity groups, that is, their individual experienced connection to a larger entity. But not only are collective identities experienced by individuals, they also come to live in the physical world in cultural materials, as Polletta and Jasper stated. On their turn, these cultural materials help to create and reinforce 'us' and 'them' divides (Eyerman 2006: 2006). It is the academic field of performance theory which we will now turn to, in order to understand how this occurs.

1.3 Performance theory

Tilly's theatrical metaphor for collective action was not new. Its origin can be found in the 1950's. The influential American-Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman was one of the core founders of the dramaturgical turn in the social sciences. In his highly cited work f*The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1956) presented a framework in which he argued social interaction can best be studied as theater, in with individuals being actors and audiences, which are constantly performing their beliefs and emotions. He defined the performance as 'all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants.' (Goffman 1956: 8). This performative

turn in social theory thus derives from the idea that human action and interaction can be viewed as dramaturgical, theatrical performances and should be studied as such to understand how social reality is constructed. It assumes that social actors 'implicitly orient towards others as if they were actors on a stage seeking identification with their experiences and understandings from their audiences' (Alexander 2006: 2).

In his volume, to which he made a large contribution himself, Jeffrey Alexander (2006) and his co-authors give a rather complete image of the application of performance theory in social research. Alexander puts meaning at the center of attention studying social life (2006: 2). In his chapter, he provides a macro-sociological model through which social action can be studied as cultural performances (2006: 32). The cultural performance is defined as 'the social process by which actors, individually or in groups display for others the meaning of their social situation' (Alexander 2006: 32). In his framework he breaks down the cultural performance into six main elements: actors, audience, systems of collective representation, means of symbolic production, *mise-en-scène* and social power. Herein, the definitions of actors and audience are self-evident, they entail respectively the performing actor and the observer. The systems of collective representation as the 'codes that provide analogies and antipathies and by narratives that provide chronologies' (Alexander 2006: 33). The means of symbolic production are 'the mundane material things that allow symbolic projections to be made. [...] Objects that can serve as iconic representations to help [actors] dramatize and make vivid the invisible motives and morals they are trying to represent' (Alexander 2006: 35). Mise-en-scène is, like in theatrical performances, how all the different components are put together in a play (Alexander 2006: 35).

In the same work, Ronald Eyerman (2006) provides a chapter already elaborated on the added value of performance theory in social movement research. Dramaturgy links 'cognitive framing, narration and discourse with the practice of mobilization' (Eyerman 2006: 207). In other words, narratives do not only exist in text, they also come to life and are dramatized during physical plays. These ritual practices 'blur the boundaries between individual and collective, between the private and the public, and help fuse a group through creating strong emotional bonds between participants' (Eyerman 2006: 196). This process helps to understand how individual identities become a collective one, by means of a shared purpose, solidarity and shared memories (Eyerman 2006: 195). In sum, performances help to glue the narratives together and to attach meaning to them, which constitutes a feeling of

collectivity among the participants in during demonstrations, for example. This phenomenon has been described by Fabian Virchow (2007) in his work on neo-Nazi's music festivals in Germany and by Mabel Berezin (2007) in her account of campaign rallies of the *Front National* in France, both describing what Virchow calls 'emotional collectives' (149) that sustain and reinforce an individual's sense of belonging.

Integrating performance theory in research on identity construction processes has also been done done by Todd Fuist (2013). He coined the term of ideological performances, which helps to study collective identity formation at the level of interaction (439). He takes Alexander's concept a step further, by arguing social movement members are constantly performing their values and beliefs, not only publicly, but also during private social interaction. By observing these private performances, which exist of primarily the day-to-day interactions between members of movements, one can arguably study processes of identity formation at the interactional level. While Fuist's approach linking performativity and identity construction at the interactional level is definitely a great contribution, it has proven to be difficult to get access to private meetings and events of the movements that are subject of this essay. This research does not aim to view the psychological processes of identity construction by studying everyday interaction, rather, it looks at public performances that are incorporated in the contentious repertoire of the movements.

In sum, performance theory thus can help to understand how meaning is constructed and attached to certain places, objects, narratives et cetera. The conceptions of collective identity that are in the minds of people, the narratives that constitute them, the symbolic boundaries that are described, the rules of membership that are identified, become tangible and real during protest events in the physical and digital world in the shape of cultural performances. Thus, combining a collective identity approach to dramaturgy in social movement research enables researchers to understand how the beliefs and ideologies of the movement's members are enacted and made visible in the movement's acts of contention.

Chapter 2 Methodology

Before diving into the theoretical and empirical contents of this research, it is essential to incorporate a methodological chapter. After all, qualitative research based on fieldwork is flexible in nature. While there are no blueprints, there are guidelines that help to find your way during research. For instance, Della Porta's (2014) work on methodology in relation to social movements was of significant value. Before, during and after the data collection phase choices were made that contributed to this final product. Not only choices relating to study objects, locations, time periods, data collection techniques, sampling methods, but also choices concerning the theoretical framework, the analysis and selection of the raw data, and methods of analysis have been made. This work makes both empirical and methodological claims. Therefore, it is essential for the research's legitimacy that both, the findings of the research, as the way the research came to these findings must be valid. The purpose of this chapter is to legitimize both the empirical and methodological claims that are made in this research. First, the research design elaborates on the ontological and epistemological stances taken in this research, the types of data collected, the data collection techniques that have been used accordingly and the methods of sampling. The research method, then, encompasses the systemic plan for data collection and analysis. The goal of the method section is to provide the reader with a clear image how the research question was broken down into sub-questions, which were based on the theoretical framework that provide the tools and indicators that enabling the researcher to formulate findings. Finally, some limitations of the research and the approach taken will be pointed out.

2.1 Research Design

Ontologically, this research assumes that there is no singular social reality, rather it believes reality shaped in human interaction and human interpretations of the social context, in which meanings and symbols play an essential part. The research seeks to map diversity and similarity in perceptions of social identity groups among members of social movements. Thus, the research aims to map and study perceptions of reality, but also how perceptions of reality are displayed in the world. Therefore, this research takes an interpretivist

epistemological stance, revolving around extracting and interpreting qualitative data from the social environment using primarily in-depth interviewing -to map perceptions- and observation -to map human action and cultural materials. These data collection techniques are used to respectively produce 'generated data' and 'naturally occuring data' (Ritchie 2003:36).

Generated data

The former relates to data which is produced together by the researcher and the social movement members during in-depth interviews, which serve as the main tool to produce data relating to the meanings, beliefs and interpretations of the participant (Ritchie 2003: 36). The interviews were semi-structured, meaning that I had a topic guide including the following themes to explore: personal backgrounds, their degree of involvement in their movements, potential involvement in different movements, personal interpretations of Flemish-nationalism, interpretations of Flemish culture and identity, problems and threats for Flanders, responses to the membership of their organization and their use of social media. Evidently, the views and statements of the participants that are brought forward in this research are a selection of a large pile of interview data. The topics relating to ideology, culture and identity receive the most attention in this research, as these personal understandings of these phenomena contribute best to answering the main question. Each interview was semi-structured and therefore took its own shape during the course of the conversation. This means that, at least to a certain extent, meaning is socially constructed by both the researcher and the participant, making the researcher the co-creator of knowledge. So on an epistemological note, it is important to mention that this research takes a social realist approach, admitting that the researcher plays a subjective role, but is convinced that the interviewee has a set of beliefs, perceptions and understandings which the researcher is able to extract. All my interviews were conducted and transcribed in Dutch, after which the parts embedded in this research have been translated into English by myself.

This research takes a case-centric approach. To find participants, non-probability sampling was used, meaning that the units of analysis were purposely selected in relation to the research question, not intended to be statistically representative for a wider population. Snowball, convenience and purposive sampling were combined to get in touch with participants. At first, the goal of the research was solely to focus on Schild & Vrienden. After contacting the Facebook page of Schild & Vrienden founder Dries Van Langenhove, one of

the admins gave me Van Langenhove's personal phone number, in order to establish contact. Because he was busy with his political campaign, it took a few weeks before I could interview him. After this conversation, it proved to be difficult to find more members of the movements who were willing to talk, because Van Langenhove did not reach out to help and find other potential participants. On one of Van Langenhove's campaign rallies, I met a member who wanted to participate in an interview, after which he helped me find another participant. Both were very open and cooperative, but they were not able to help in finding new participants. After some weeks went by trying to find more Schild & Vrienden members, I broadened my scope of research, and focused on several other organizations that are part of the Flemish movement. Members of the student associations NSV! and KVHV were willing to participate in interviews. It turned out that many of them were still or were formerly affiliated with Schild & Vrienden. After three months in Flanders, I managed to speak to twelve individuals, of which three members of Schild & Vrienden, five members of NSV!, and four of KVHV. Some NSV! and KVHV members still identified strongly with Schild & Vrienden. They were active in different departments of their respective organizations in Flanders. The majority of my participants, eleven out of twelve, are or have been enrolled in a higher educational institution. The sample frame included all individuals that were between fifteen and twenty-eight years of age and were or had been active members of either Schild & Vrienden, NSV!, KVHV or multiple. Women were not excluded from the sampling frame, but were not interviewed either.[6] Schild & Vrienden leader Van Langenhove was interviewed in the Flemish Interest office in Brussels, the rest of my interviews were conducted in bars or coffee shops in Antwerp, Ghent, Leuven, Boom and Oostende. Some of the topics covered in the interview are considered politically charged, or even controversial. To ensure that my participants would speak freely -as free as possible-, the names of all my participants have been anonymized, all but Schild & Vrienden leader Dries Van Langenhove, since the movement's ideology equals the ideology of the movement.

---

[6] The lack of feminine input in this research is a pity, but also may create an opportunity for future research. As far as I am aware, both NSV and KVHV also have an equal amount of female members. Of Schild & Vrienden, according to Dries 1/10 of the members are female.

Naturally occuring data

Naturally occurring data allows for the investigation of phenomena in their natural settings and provide data that reflects the enactment of social behaviour in its own social setting (Ritchie 2003: 34). To produce an account of the action repertoire of the new-radical right, it is this type of data that is primarily collected. To do so, the data collection techniques that have been used are direct and indirect observation, respectively to record and analyse behaviour, verbal and non verbal communication of Schild & Vrienden members. Also, to explore the systems of social meaning underlying their actions, or broadly: the cultural context. After all, studying social performances without some extent of the cultural context as it is presented by the performer leaves the performance meaningless. The direct observation was done by attending two rallies, both organized by Flemish Interest: a meeting for free speech in Antwerp on 16 March 2019 and one of Dries Van Langenhove's campaign meetings in Scherpenheuvel-Zichem on 11 April 2019. Indirect observation was used to gather data of different events, such as the March against Marrakesh, the NSV! protest marches in 2018 and 2019, the protests of Schild & Vrienden and social media pages of the respective movements. Since a large amount of the movements presence takes place in the digital space, Youtube videos, Facebook and Instagram posts are a valuable source of data. To a lesser extent, the websites of the movements I researched provided some relevant data. Social media in this research are viewed as stages themselves, as an extension of the physical stages of the movements. Because the amount of online data in this respect is very large, a selection had to be made. This was done using non-probability sampling, more specifically, purposive sampling. I deemed this most suitable, considering that my research is looking to construct an image of the contentious repertoire and how certain conceptions of identities come to live in cultural materials within this repertoire. This is most convincingly presented by selecting specific social media posts and protest events that are illustrative for the repertoire.

The combination of these different kinds of data collection techniques will allow the research to present an account of the perceptions of identity groups that are present among participants, the cultural context that surrounds them. This will be followed by an image of action repertoire of the new radical right, and describing how different perceptions of identity are enacted within this repertoire. Data triangulation was applied in an attempt to reach a

legitimate and multi-layered result. This means practically that what was said, was compared to what was observed, to what was written or posted in order to formulate findings.

2.2 Research Method

As laid out in the section above, the empirical evidence was collected using different data collection techniques. In-depth interviewing was used in relation to perceptions of social identity groups. Direct and remote observation were used as a tool to assess and map the contentious repertoire of the new radical right, and its use of cultural materials. This section unfolds the plan of action, the recipe that was used in order to get from an empirical observation, to research questions and sub-questions, to empirical evidence answering these questions. To operationalize the following research puzzle, it was broken down into different components.

How are different meanings and perceptions of Flemish identity performed and reinforced in the contentious repertoire of the new-flamingant radical right?

The complication looks at 1). The new-flamingant radical right 2). Their contentious repertoire 3). Meanings and perceptions of Flemishness 4). The performance of this identity. These are the four elements that make up the puzzle. The first sub-question that can be derived is: what organizations does the new-flamingant radical right consist of? The rest of the sub-questions will be used by departing from the analytic frames that informed the research puzzle: performance theory and identity theories. Concepts extracted from these research fields formed the foundation of the sub-questions, which will then be used to define indicators that can help to answer these questions.

The definition of social identity is 'about the relationship between the individual and the environment. [...] The emphasis is not on what makes a person unique, but on similarities to some and differences from others' (Verkuyten 2005: 42). The sub-question that can be derived is: what meanings and beliefs of Flemish identity do members of Flemish radical right-wing youth movements carry?

Contentious repertoires are defined as 'an array of claim-making performances that activists usually employ in sets of two or more (Tilly 2008: 121). The resulting sub-question

is: what array of claim-making performances are employed by the new-flamingant radical right? And finally, as defined by Polletta and Jasper (2001: 285): collective identities are expressed in cultural materials. This results in the final sub-questions: what cultural materials are used to express and reinforce collective identities during public performances?

Answering these four sub-questions results in an answer to the main puzzle that is formulated in this research. The next step is to formulate indicators that operationalize the sub-questions, based on the literature of the theoretical field. Indicators for defining the contentious repertoire are the concrete forms of protest, such as: 'the formation of special-purpose claim-making associations and coalitions, public meetings, petition drives, street demonstrations, vigils, rallies, public statements, and lobbying of political authorities' (Tilly 2008: 121).' Indicators for the social categories are '(1) rules of membership that decide who is and who is not a member of the category; and (2) content, that is, sets of characteristics (such as beliefs, desires, moral commitments and physical attributes) thought to be typical of members of the category, or behaviours expected or obliged of members in certain situations (roles) (Fearon and Laitin 2000: 848). Other indicators that are used are us-them dichotomies that are emphasized, and effects on the own identity group which is attributed to other groups. Indicators for different elements of the performances as described by Jeffrey Alexander, finally, consist of myths, traditions, stories about culture, chants, but also material objects such as clothing, flags, symbols, and physical locations. These indicators are used both in the physical and digital environments.

The data collection techniques described in the previous section have been used to procure the relevant data to answer the sub-questions. To map the conceptions of social identity, members have been asked about their interpretation of Flemish-nationalism, their opinion on Flemish culture, the threats they identify for Flanders, Belgium and Europe, their views on Wallonia, immigration and politics, and their view on the condition of Belgium, and their perceptions of Flemish identity. To map the collective social movement identities, the following questions were asked to make sense of the 'individual's cognitive, moral and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice or institution'. Participants were asked questions such as: when did you first hear of the movement? What ideas attracted you? Why did you become a member? How would you describe your movement's ideology? What is your own interpretation of Flemish-nationalism? What

differences with other Flemish-nationalist social movement organizations do you identify? How does your environment respond to your membership?

In order to map the contentious repertoire, news sources were read, videos were viewed, participants have been asked about their involvement in protest actions and the methods of protest of their movements. To map how the collective identities are expressed during performances, different protest acts and social media posts have been observed, using the cultural performances framework, looking at different narratives, symbols, objects and chants that represent the Flemish identity group.

.

2.3 Limitations

Researchers should always be aware of the inevitable shortcomings in their research. I am no exception. The limitations to this research relate to methodology, ethics and positionality. To start with the latter, the positionality: the researchers' relationship *vis-a-vis* the studied organizations and individuals. As mentioned afore, doing interpretative research is inseparably linked and influenced by the beliefs and systems of meaning of the researcher. It would be naïve to pretend this research to be objective in that regard. In her research on the *Front National*, Bezerin mentioned that for researchers 'it is genuinely uncomfortable to interact directly with groups whose views one not only doesn't share but for whom one feels a certain distance - and distaste' (Berezin 2007: 132). Della Porta identified that social movement researchers often study movements with which they sympathize, which results in researchers to take in normative positions (Della Porta 2014: 3). For these reasons, since this work is interpretative in nature, I find it preferable to make my own political preference knowable. I myself am not active within a political party or social or political movement. However, I have a strong interest in politics and international relations. I do strongly identify with parties that are considered to be left-wing, social and green. The main motivation for conducting this research is the curiosity for the attractive power of the far-right. This research is most certainly not driven by aversion or dislike towards far-right wing supporters and their perceptions, whilst I do acknowledge that to a large extent my political and societal views are not in line with the beliefs and ideas of my participants. I am in no way seeking to discredit or negatively address the perceptions of my interviewees, as this would not contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon. Unavoidably, there have been certain ideas which I found

controversial, but as mentioned in the introduction, I am convinced that it is not the task of the academic to make moral judgements about participants's ideas. I am only looking to what conceptions of identity groups are alive among members of radical-right wing movements and how these come to life.

A second important limitation of my research has already been touched upon earlier in the methodology. While in broad terms all organizations do fit the new radical right definition, I have tried to map the nuance and diversity among individual members. However, not all opinions of every participant are systematically brought forward in the empirical chapters of this piece of work. Rather, quotes and opinions of participants have selectively been sampled in order to illustrate a general image or observation, while at the same time attention *was* paid to the diversity in opinions. Many of my participants though were very nuanced in their opinions and arguments, this research attempts to justly portray their ideals and values. Some members may disagree that they are positioned under the radical-right umbrella, but this header primarily relates to the organizations they represent. All the different nuances and sets of beliefs could fill an entire new book.

A third limitation of this research involves the validity of what is said during interviews. Considering the fact that far-right wing supporters are generally cautious speaking to outsiders, it may well be that at least some of them were cautious to formulate answers surrounding sensitive topics such as immigration or their relation towards other cultures or nationalities. Furthermore, I have only spoken to all participants just once. To overcome potential closed attitudes, mutual trust is an important pillar. Explaining the goals of my research, I assured them I was not aiming to frame them and their movements in a negative way, but that I was intending to map what their organizations and their interpretations of Flemish-nationalism were about. As most of them were board members of their organizations, they seemed comfortable and well-willing to open themselves up during the conversations I had.

Chapter 3 Identity & The new Radical Right

'If you have two Flemish-nationalists, there are four opinions and six parties'[7]

One of the main pitfalls of social movement research, is that it is easy to forget that movements are made up of individuals, all with their own background stories, beliefs, values, morals, motivations et cetera. For researchers, this can be quite a challenge, because it is easier to speak in generalizing terms. Although I do acknowledge that social movements mostly speak with one voice and present themselves to the public as a coherent whole, by in-depth interview data this chapter will provide a comprehensive overview of conceptions of social identity groups on the individual level. It will serve as an attempt to unravel the dominant and less dominant perceptions of what different social categories consist of. It will become evident, that the participants' social identities are plural and multi-layered.

This chapter consists of two sections, that should give answers to the first two sub-questions of the research. In the first section, the question will be answered what the new radical right consists of. Its goal of the first section is to provide an overview of the characteristics and ideologies of the different organizations. This will be done primarily based on interview data from conversations between me and my participants, and information provided on their websites. It outlines the collective identities of the movements, in the 'product' sense of the definition, that is their main ideologies, goals and orientations. It also touches upon the perceived feeling of collectivity among the members of the movement, steering towards the mapping the feeling of collectivity among the movements' members. It proceeds to position Schild en Vrienden within the young-flamingant right, by showing how members of NSV and KVHV view the movement. In sum, it reflects how members view their own organizations. This helps to get a better understanding of how the movements can be distinguished.

The second question that will be answered is: what meanings and beliefs of Flemish identity do members of Flemish radical right wing youth movements carry? It takes the primary social identity group of all individuals as point of departure: the Fleming. Next, the different perceptions of what Flemish identity entails will be explored. It shows how , it aims to show the diversity among members. Here, collective identity as a process comes in,

---

[7] Author's interview with Willem on 7 May 2019 at Cafe Patrick Foley's in Ghent.

focusing on the individual's connection to a larger entity, and the boundaries that are interpreted. It looks at the different goals for Flanders that participants propose, but most of all, looks at the sub-identities that underlie conceptions of Flemishness, and the subsequent social boundaries that are imagined by the participants. Furthermore, it will show that De Witte's (2006) conclusion that ethno-nationalism was the main reason to participate in far-right wing activism, is still relevant today.

3.1 The Flemish new Radical Right

Katholiek Vlaams Hoogstudentenverbond

The first branch of KVHV was established in 1887 in Ghent. It does have a strong political colour, namely right-wing conservative. The KVHV is mainly focused on 'forming' their members, focusing on four important pillars: Catholicism, Flemishness, traditional student values and alliance or brotherhood. On their websites these are explained as follows: Catholicism and catholic values are at the roots of Flanders, and a great part of Europe. The only way to emancipate Flanders is by understanding that Flanders is catholic. It is about the importance of a set of shared values. The Flemish pillar refers to the aforementioned emancipation, ideally working towards an independent Flemish state. The pillar *Hoogstudent* is a classic term to distinguish university students from high school students. The final pillar, brotherhood, refers to being part of the association for life. This provides a foundation for mutual trust and friendship (KVHV 2015). For Richard (KVHV), what attracted him was that members did not try to convince him to become a member. People come and if there is a click, they join and they will stay, because 'once you take up our colours, you take them into your casket.'[8] Ideologically, what members have in common it is that they share conservative principles. Some are more liberal, and some are more authoritarian. Primarily, members are attracted by the conservative values that KVHV promotes. There is a lot of overlap with NSV, which may be unsurprising considering NSV is a KVHV split-off. Besides the fact that NSV! has incorporated a pillar of 'activism' in the organization, Flemish-nationalism is the end goal for NSV!, says Robin. There is a lot of commonality, even beside Flemish-nationalism. Such as the focus on traditional student values. But Richard chose KVHV, because 'they (NSV!) are pure nationalists and that is not something for me. Their

---

[8] Author's interview with Richard on 20 May 2019 at Cafe De Kroon in Ghent.

ethnic-nationalism means they even would support the leftist nation of Catalonia to become independent, and that is not something I can ideologically support.'[9] While Flemishness is one of the key pillars, Richard says that, at least for him, Flemish-nationalism is more a means to an end. Flemish-nationalism can be used to reach a conservative society. Daniël (KVHV) was attracted by the flamingant character of the movement, combined with the focus on conservatism, student traditions and style. While he is not a catholic, he is assured that Catholicism is at the foundation of the Flemish society and deserves a more important place in society again. Michael (28) joined the organization years ago,

Nationalistische Studentenvereniging

The Nationalist Students' Association, was formed as a split-off of KVHV in the 1976s. For the NSV!, Flemish independence is the ultimate goal. Most of the problems that Flanders faces would be solved by having an independent nation. The pillars that are most important for them are: education, action and 'studentness', which respectively involve the ideological education of their members to provide them with knowledge and tools to form opinions, the element of protest and the promotion of traditional student values and companionship. NSV-Ghent, of which the most of my participants were members, has around thirty active members. Annually, they organize protest marches and throughout the year they have smaller protests, with flyers or posters, nowadays trying to make a shift to organizing actions on social media as well. All factions are autonomous, and there is little communication between the boards of the different departments, although there is an overarching board. Ideologically, nationalism -what is in a name- is the core value of the movement. On the website, they describe their 'mission': 'Since the seventies, leftists control universities and traditional Flemish-nationalist students ideologically diminish. Ever since, the mission is to radically promote nationalism'. Accordingly,

> NSV! chooses the Flemish independence resolutely. It is the right of every nation to choose its own faith. Every ethnic group has the right to its own nation. So have we. But nationalism is more than separatism. As nationalists, we want to preserve our uniqueness. We are not grey cosmopolitans looking the same everywhere in the world, nor are we individualists, only minimally connecting with our fellow men. The

---

[9] Ibidem.

individual is rooted in different communities: the family, the nation, the culture. Mass migration to Europe has put great pressure on the communities both in the hosting country and the country of departure. The consequences are evident: Flamings do not feel at home anymore in their neighbourhoods, girls no longer dare to take the bus on their own, and there is mutual incomprehension. For us, it has been enough: close the tap and who violates the law, who does not want to assimilate or refuses to work must return back home. At the same time we are against Europe's foreign policy destabilizing the Middle East and the African continent. Europe must be able to defend its own continent, not clean up the United States' mess.

In sum, the most important values of NSV are striving for Flemish independence, because they believe in the right of nations for self-determination. They want to preserve the communities in which the individual is rooted, which are the family, nation and culture. Mass immigration is one of the main issues that can negatively influence these roots.

Koen (24) is an NSV!-member who grew up in a traditional flamingant family: an 'NSV baby', he calls himself, since his parents already were both members. Ever since he was young, he wanted to join NSV!. 'First I was mainly busy with the pillar of "studentness", but an increasing amount of people are joining us that have not grown up in a flamingant family, like the people that become Schild & Vrienden members: the meme generation'.[10] As aforementioned, NSV! is for the largest part focused on educating their members, providing them with the ideological background and the skills to form opinions and to argue. This is also his main motivation to stay active as a member of NSV!: teaching and keeping alive traditional Flemish student traditions and values, songs, culture and history.[11]

The organization has some rules of membership which individuals must live up to. When people want to become a member, they start of as candidates. In this initiation time, they have to prove themselves to be able to represent the association and that they are a valuable contribution. Primarily, this manifests itself in attending events, writing an essay, proving that you make an effort for the association. 'If we see that people do not fit in our group, then we will stop the initiation.'[12] Ideologically, people can still be educated, Willem says, but

---

[10] Author's interview with Koen on 1 May 2019 at Cafe The Barn in Ghent.
[11] Ibidem.
[12] Author's interview with Willem on 7 May 2019 at Cafe Patrick Foley's in Ghent.

sometimes there is just a combination of the ideas and the behaviour of people that make them unfit. And since they are still are student association, they also aim at creating a fun group of people. Thus, the association has clear rules of membership. Like Koen, Cornel (23, NSV!) grew up in a flamingant family. He remembers going to a Flemish national music event, which impressed him when he was young. Later he learned about the existence of NSV!, which promoted the Flemish-nationalist ideals. He had considered joining the 'friendly rivals' of KVHV, but the central role of Catholicism made it less appealing.[13] Plus, 'They are a bit more traditional and formal, the NSV! members I found more sympathetic.'[14] All NSV! members were attracted by the strong presence of the political component, that it is a student association not just focused on drinking. Together with the focus student traditions, such as *cantussen:* traditional evenings revolving around drinking, but primarily singing Flemish student songs.[15] These traditional and political elements are aspects by which all members strongly define the organization's uniqueness, in relation to other associations.

Schild & Vrienden

Schild & Vrienden is thus a meta-political Flemish-nationalist youth movement founded in 2017. Its goal is to promote active citizenship among the Flemish youth.[16] Initially, the group started solely as a Facebook group for right-wing oriented individuals, primarily students. In May 2017, the Belgian secretary of state for asylum and migration Theo Francken from the Flemish-oriented party N-VA was invited by KVHV-Ghent as a speaker at the Ghent University. Because left-wing protesters had disturbed earlier meet-ups with Francken as a speaker, founder of the Schild & Vrienden Facebook page Dries Van Langenhove appealed to the members of the group to attend the meeting as safety stewards. Of the approximately five hundred Facebook group members, around ninety showed up. It was after this event that Van Langenhove realized that the Facebook group had a mobilization capacity with great potential.[17] In August 2017, Van Langenhove and several other members decided to turn the Facebook page into a more formal organization, focused on promoting active citizenship among the Flemish youth. In the following months, the movement started organizing public

---

[13] Author's interview with Cornel on 2 May 2019 at Cafe De Kroon in Ghent.
[14] Ibidem.
[15] From the Latin cantare, meaning: singing.
[16] Author's interview with Dries on 22 April at the Flemish Interest party office in Brussels.
[17] Ibidem.

events, during which members were called upon to start collecting litter, visit old people's homes, donate blood, give soup to the homeless, cleaning monuments and other communal services. At the same time, it started building its public appearance, creating public Facebook and Instagram pages, a logo and later on clothing and other merchandise representing the organization. In September 2018, a reportage produced by the Flemish broadcasting company VRT showed how members sent around a lot of controversial 'memes' in their private messaging group. This television report made the documentary commonly known across the Flemish region. The effect on the movement was significant: it was condemned by a great amount of politicians and political parties, media and universities. Members were banned from political parties, houses of members of the chat group were searched, judicial processes were put in motion. At the same time, the movement became one of biggest non-(party)political youth organization in Flanders. It has over a thousand members, but taking the amount of likes on the Facebook page into account, one can easily conclude that the amount of persons identifying with the movement is far bigger.. Even though a like does not necessarily mean support, the forty thousand preference votes for Dries during the last elections illustrates the wide support for the movement of individuals that are over eighteen, even though the majority of the target audience of Schild & Vrienden has not even surpassed that age.

There is a large amount of young Flemish people that identify with the movement. According to leader Dries Van Langenhove, what binds Schild & Vrienden members is a feeling of nationalism: 'Simply put, this is about the willingness to guarantee the preservation and continuation of the beautiful future of the nation. We have progressive members, conservatives, people that are economically more social or liberal, that's where we differ in opinion. But putting the Flemish nation first, that is something we all agree on, so: Flemish-nationalism.'[18] Nick (S&V) is the youngest participant of my research, he confirms Dries' analysis. After seeing the documentary of the movement, he became curious about the activism the movement engaged in and did his research online. He was not raised in a flamingant family, yet 'what attracted me was the pride, the nationalism. The love for the country, which I already had.'[19] It was at a time during which he became increasingly interested in politics,

---

[18] Ibidem.
[19] Author's interview with Nick on 30 April 2019 at Cafe Hollywood in Boom.

or well, I was interested in a lot, but I didn't really know what I thought was right or wrong. Then I saw Schild & Vrienden in the report, after which I did my own research and it suited me. [..] I entered the Discord group of the Make Vlaenderen Great Again Facebook page, where someone asked: "if you want to fight for your country, send me a message" - this was for fun -, so that's what I did. He was from NSV!. That's how I joined the climate march in Brussels, with Dries himself.[20]

During this event, Nick felt very welcome, the other participants were nice to him. And he was charmed by Dries.

It was a bit of a shock to suddenly spend the entire day with a famous person. And Dries was very friendly. When someone called him names he politely smiled back to them and when at a given moment people were yelling "Fuck you, Dries", he just yelled along with them, it shows how comfortable he is. [...] Although on every climate march we joined, we were attacked or surrounded. Once we were standing on a square and within two minutes we were completely surrounded [...] It was a bit intimidating, but it gave an adrenaline rush.[21]

Since then, he is engaged in the movement and tries to attend to many events. A friend of his, Harold (S&V), has been involved in the movement a bit longer, since the March against Marrakesh. Like Nick, the screening of Pano-report was the first time he heard of the movement, which in his opinion gives a completely wrong impression of the movement. Meeting other Schild & Vrienden members changed his image. During the climate march in Brussels, which Nick also attended, he noted that the responses from the other protesters on the presence of Schild & Vrienden members were very negative, but walking there as a group he described as a positive feeling. In short, both members were attracted by the activist character of the movement.

These two members thus joined Schild & Vrienden after the documentary was aired, so they were very well aware of the controversies surrounding the organization. But

---

[20] Ibidem.
[21] Ibidem.

according to Harold, Schild & Vrienden is more than people posting memes and tearing down flags. 'Making people read books, exercise, live a healthy life, that is Schild & Vrienden as well, but they do not show that in the report'.[22] The image that people have of Schild & Vrienden, that 'Schild & Vrienden consists of only Flemish people, blond hair with blue eyes, marching through the streets. That is completely untrue [...] We are no monsters, we don't have swastika's tattooed on our backs'.[23] It is also for this reason that he wants to speak to me and why he attends events: he wants to show and explain that Schild & Vrienden members are ordinary people. What connects them, according to Harold, is that all members want to get the best out of themselves. 'We are not going outside in our sweatpants if we are not training, we think about what we eat, we read, acquire knowledge, a lot of things'.[24] Throughout the interview, Harold repeatedly refers to the movement as a large friend group. He says that it is more than an organization, that they treat each other as if they are family. He cannot really pinpoint why he and fellow members he meets connect so well in a small amount of time, but the feeling exists. For Gaston (NSV!), like for Harold, what makes Schild & Vrienden attractive, is that it focuses on different aspects: 'The physical aspect, health and mind. Promoting to take care of yourself.'[25] He has been a member of the movement since the beginning, since two years, and he is also an NSV!-member. According to him, the two movements differ in that NSV! really is a student association, while the target audience of Schild & Vrienden is larger. Also ideologically, Schild & Vrienden does not have core principles outlined in a document. As Dries says, 'Schild & Vrienden is a way of life, we don't have departments, party membership, those things'.[26]

Schild en Vrienden in the new-flamingant right

When Schild & Vrienden was still only a Facebook discussion group, many of my interviewees identified it as a place for right-wing oriented students to engage in discussions about all kinds of topics. It was a way for different flamingant youth movements, such as NSV! and KVHV, to stay in contact with other young members of the Flemish movement. The majority of the members of NSV! and KVHV I spoke to have been affiliated with Schild

---

[22] Author's interview with Harold on 18 April 2019 at a cafe near the train station in Leuven.
[23] Ibidem.
[24] Ibidem.
[25] Ibidem.
[26] Interview Dries, 4 April, Brussels.

& Vrienden in the beginning. One of them is still active. All of them were in the Facebook discussion group, but most chose to become more engaged in their own associations for different reasons. Cornel (NSV!), for example, lost interest when the Facebook group became more than just a place for discussion. Furthermore, reasons to not be involved have to do with the fact that there is no clear ideology and that it comes across as the personal cult of Dries Van Langenhove, 'a prestige project', since everything seems to revolve around the leader.[27] Willem (NSV!) identifies multiple differences between his movement and Schild & Vrienden

> After the entire affair I said, stay away from Schild & Vrienden. I think people realize it is not as fantastic as it seemed. [...] After all these months, there is no clear board, no clear program, now Dries is involved in party politics. Also ideologically, there is no control on the members, who post everything everywhere. [...] Our own association exists since the seventies, with multiple departments in Flanders. We have a real history, Schild & Vrienden barely exists two years. That's nothing on the timescale we are operational. We have proven we can actually mean something on the campus. True, Schild & Vrienden have an impact in the media, but that does not mean we all want to be Schild & Vrienden members.[28]

So, overall differences that are identified by members of NSV! is that broadly speaking, Schild & Vrienden lacks an organizational structure, a clear ideology, has no responsibility over their members and foremost, NSV! only aims at reaching students.

The KVHV members I spoke to praise the movement's causes. Richard, was for a long time highly active:

> I was a Schild & Vrienden member from the first beginning, when the FB group only had fifty members, but I made the choice for the association [KVHV]. I know that Schild & Vrienden will reach a lot, and I completely support Dries and the organization, but I am less focused on activism, which is their power. My goal is to

---

[27] Interview Willem, 7 May 2019, Ghent.
[28] Ibidem.

collect human capital, and that happens less with them. What they do is amazing, but cannot be compared to the association.[29]

He identified that Schild & Vrienden members increasingly have joined KVHV, and they are members with great potential. 'They often have the right mindset, the right motivation. Not the pure nationalists, more conservative and catholics.'[30] Michael (KVHV) has observed that the new generations that join KVHV have a lot of knowledge and need less education, because they have educated themselves in conservatism through the popular English internet forum 4chan and other alt-right forums.[31] He claims that Schild & Vrienden to a large extent was a product of KVHV, because Dries Van Langenhove was a KVHV member. According to him, the most important Schild & Vrienden protest, which will be discussed in the next chapter, was originally a KVHV action.

Thus, the new-flamingant right consists of an array of movements and individuals. The common denominator of the movements is a focus on Flemish-nationalism. The movements relate to each other in several interesting ways. First of all, Schild & Vrienden founder Dries Van Langenhove, is a member of KVHV-Ghent. The Facebook page was first a discussion group where right-wing oriented people discussed politics and societal issues. When it became an official organization, most of the members of the the other associations lost interest, primarily because they were already involved in their own movements, but also because some thought the movement is lacking ideology. NSV! and KVHV relate to each other in the sense that NSV! emerged from KVHV in 1976, since it wanted to include an activist component in the student association. Ideologically, they share most of their values, although NSV! is more focused on nationalism, where conservatism and catholic values are generally more important for KVHV. What is also observed, is that NSV and KVHV have clear rules of membership, in the sense that there is an initiation period which individuals may or may not pass, dependent on ability to promote the values of the organization and presenting well-reasoned arguments and opinions.

---

[29] Interview Richard, 20 May 2019, Brussels.
[30] Ibidem.
[31] 4Chan is an internet forum that is predominantly, but not exclusively, used by alternative right supporters to discuss politics and societal issues.

3.2 Flemish-nationalism and social boundaries

Whereas the previous section has focused primarily on a descriptive image of the new radical right, by outlining what the primary ideologies and the goals of the organizations were, and how the different organizations related to each other, this paragraph will zoom in on the level of the individual. It departs from the overarching ideal of Flemish-nationalism, which is the most dominant overlapping feature across the three movements. It will focus on the diversity of interpretations hereof, and subsequent on identity groups and characteristics that are perceived by participants.

The Fleming

What has become evident from the interviews, is that members primarily define themselves in terms of their ethnicity, more specifically as ethnically Flemish. This strokes with the motivation of most members to engage in activism, which is primarily Flemish-nationalism. In this research, the most identified by my participants is an ethnic one. It is beyond the scope of this research to dive into the much debated concept of ethnicity, but authors generally agree that it is the that it is 'the *idea and belief* in a common origin, descent, and history that distinguishes ethnic identity from other social identities (my emphasis) (Verkuyten 2005: 74)'. Thus, ethnic identity can be viewed as a subtype of social identity, but it differs in the sense that a common history is at the foundation of the feeling of belonging.

This section will provide an insight into the ways individual participants refer to the social identity that can be categorized as Flemings, by identifying social boundaries, definitions of intergroup relations, rules of membership and typical characteristics of the social category. As outlined in the previous chapter, social identities are often defined in terms of social boundaries, creating an 'us'-'them' dichotomy. Of equal importance is how people define the effect of the 'them' on their own social group.

A central characteristic which Flemish-nationalists ascribe to the social category of Flemish people, is a *sense* of Flemishness. According to Dries, Koen, Ward, for example, Flemish identity is hard to define, rather it is very instinctive feeling. If you try to define it, Dries goes, you will come to unrealistic classifications.[32] However, this feeling can be

---

[32] Interview Dries, 4 April 2019, Brussels.

defined in a shared history and future, and shared values. It is 'a sense of sameness, that you share a communal history of hundreds of years, you share the same paradigm, despite of political preferences'.[33] Cornel (NSV!) describes it as a deeply subconscious feeling 'which you may experience when you are in contact with other cultures'.[34] So foremost, it is about whether people feel Flemish. These descriptions of Flemishness illustrate the ethnic character of the social identity group: the different participants explicitly point to the communal heritage and history. In my interview with Koen, this emotional connection with the past becomes visible. When I ask him if the situation in Belgium is okay, he answers that a lot of things are going okay, 'But for how many of those things we have to be grateful to the previous generation that built it all? Why would you taunt those people?'[35] He refers to the wars that were fought by Flemish soldiers. Cornel refers to the common history of Europe as a mixture of Catholicism and paganism, which should be embraced as historical and cultural parts of the Flemish DNA. He sees this historic line of culture reflected in Christian holidays as Easter, Christmas, and more pagan traditions as maypole dances. The Flemish identity is thus embedded within a wider European identity, which is identified by many of the participants.

Europe is considered a patchwork of different cultures with the same historical and cultural background, in which Catholicism is an important aspect, according to Richard. 'There is a European connection. You have broad christianity: Catholicism, protestantism, et cetera, but also a deeper connection. The conservative ideology is dominant, I think that is the greater commonality among the European ethnic groups.'[36] All my participants agreed that there is a great amount of overlap with different European cultures, primarily in north-west European.

While some of them just see a connection, and would argue for Flemish independence, several of my participants vow for the construction of *Dietsland,* or Greater Netherlands. This refers to the conception that the Flemish and the Dutch are the same nation, that would be better of as one country. For some of the NSV-members, The South-African white population, the *Afrikaners* also make up part of this identity group. This historical connection with the population in South-Africa is emphasized by Koen, for example. 'De Boers are our ancestors, from the Dutch (as in *Diets*) perspective. [...] They waved my

---

[33] Interview Willem, 7 May 2019, Ghent.
[34] Interview Cornel, 2 May 2019, Ghent.
[35] Interview Koen, 1 May 2019, Ghent.
[36] Interview Richard, 20 May 2019, Ghent.

grandparents goodbye and wished them luck on their journey. I feel more related to them than to the Portuguese or Italians'.[37] Other participants define Flemish identity opposed do the Dutch, of which the Richard's statement below is an example. While members agree that there is no checklist towards Flemish identity, several participants do identify some typical character traits of Flemish people. A tangible one is knowledge of the Dutch language. More abstract traits are that Flemish are a hard-working nation and have a more reserved, calm personality. KVHV-member Richard explains the latter typicality as follows:

> We are a very obsequious nation, I think because we always had foreign leaders. Flanders is defined by defaitism. We were completely destroyed during the war, a lot of other nations too, but we never healed. We are very calm people, in contrast to the Dutch who are way more open and louder. We keep silent and everyone does his own thing. We do not cry together, as Flemings.[38]

Richard (KVHV) thus relates to the characteristic of calmness to military defeats in the past, directly linking the character of the contemporary Fleming to the experiences of members by the same perceived identity group in the past. This perception of is the historicity of the identity group, embedded in and formed by the wider European culture and history of Catholicism and religion, is what the ethnic Flemish group is about.

Underneath this Flemish identity is a wide range of perceived connected identity groups, such the Belgian, which is generally strongly declined. Barely any of my participants believed that one could speak of a communal Belgian culture, other than football, beers and fries. A feeling of Europeanness is perceived different participants, but primarily when discussing the issue of immigration. There is also a strong sense of conservatism among the participants, which became visible during my interviews when we were discussing the progressive and leftist direction the country steers towards. As we know by know, an essential process of self-identification, of defining one's own connection to a larger entity, is not only defined by its similarities with others, but also by emphasizing differences to others, identifying symbolic boundaries. It is this drawing of boundaries which will be the focus in the remainder of this chapter, identifying three main outgroups and their perceived effect on

---

[37] Interview Koen, 1 May 2019, Ghent.
[38] Interview Richard, 20 May 2019, Ghent.

the Flemish -and occasionally the European, Belgian, Diets or social movement- social identity groups.

The Wallonian

As aforementioned, social identity groups are defined in their relation to others. For participants of my research one of the most important ways of defining their own group, is by defining how they are different from the French speaking part of Belgium, Wallonia. After all, this is what Flemish-nationalism originally has been about: Flemish independence from the French region. Dries describes Flanders as a nation without a state, trapped in the communitarian body of Belgium:

> There are no similarities between Flanders and Wallonia, we have nothing in common. no communal television, no communal celebrities [...] There are two completely different cultures, two completely different democracies. In Flanders 75 per cent of the people votes central-right to right, while in Wallonia this is not even 20 per cent.'[39]

Cornel (NSV!), whose father is Wallonian, views Belgium as a failed marriage between the two regions. 'Flanders and Wallonia need to have the guts to say: "we are getting a divorce, this isn't working anymore". Just like in a sensible divorce you have to wish each other the best'.[40] Wallonians and Flemish are not the same people to him, and he stands behind the principle that every nation should have his own territory. Ewald (MVGA) agrees that the Belgian system does not work, according to him Flanders and Wallonia make up two separate cultures. He refers to the communal history with the Netherlands to emphasize this point:

> Belgium was found in 1830, not even two centuries ago, while since roughly the year 1000, there were already the Netherlands with Flanders and the Netherlands combined. They have always been together, with a communal culture and a communal language. They shared the Germanic culture, while the Wallonians have

---

[39] Interview Dries, 2 May 2019, Brussels.
[40] Interview Cornel, 2 May 2019, Ghent.

the French culture. Looking at history it just makes no sense to put them together, it is only natural that conflicts resulted.[41]

The above statements of Cornel, Ewald en Dries summarizes how many Flemish-nationalists view Wallonia: it is evident that they have a different culture and identity, from which the Flemish nation should separate. However, Wallonians are primarily defined in terms of their work ethics, language, and voting preference, all aspects in which they allegedly differ from the Flemish. These are the key differences that were identified during the interviews. In Brussels, Ewald (MVGA) states, you can clearly see the language barrier between the populations, for example in hospitals where doctors barely speak Dutch.[42] Furthermore, my participants identify an unfair amount of financial transfers flooding into Wallonia from Flanders and a higher degree of unemployment. But while most of them want Flanders to become independent from the French speaking region, none of my participants identify the above mentioned cultural differences as a significant threat to the Flemish identity group. Most of the participants have no problems with the Wallonian population and think they can easily function in Flanders. That social boundaries are drawn between the two, the Wallonian and Flemish identities may be obvious, but the Wallonian- 'they' only affect the Flemish- 'us' to a limited extent: Wallonia primarily is financially dependent on Flanders and most of the Wallonians have a different political preference. In sum, culturally, a different mentality is attributed to Wallonians, primarily in terms of work ethics and the different language that is spoken. The most aspects differentiating Wallonia and Flanders are defined in economic and political terms, such as unemployment rates and voting behavior. The majority of my participants do not have a negative attitude towards Wallonians of Wallonian culture. Wallonia as a region is more defined as a burden for Flanders' economic prosperity, rather than as a significant threat to Flemish identity. 'If you look at Charleroi, Brussels, those places, what it looks like, that is telling. [...] I think that the Flemish-Wallonian culture is not really the problem. I think it is the culture from outside that can form a problem.[43] The classic story about the lazy Wallonian compared to the hard working Fleming he finds not really relevant anymore. Or as Richard sums up: 'I don't see any hostility between Flemings and

---

[41] Author's interview with Ewald on 23 May 2019 at a coffee bar in Oostende.
[42] Ibidem.
[43] Interview Harold, 18 April 2019, Leuven.

Wallonians. Who thinks there is, lives inside an ethnic-nationalist bubble, that's just stupidity. [...] They belong to our nation, to a certain extent.'[44] Harold and Richard sum up the dominant conception of all my participants towards Wallonians and Wallonia. From a social identity perspective: the effect the outgroup of Wallonians have on the Flemish identity group, is not significant since it is not widely perceived to weaken the position of the Flemings within their own Flemish territory. This brings us to the second outgroup which arguably Flemish-nationalism nowadays revolves around.

Box 1. Interview fragment NSV-member Cornel: Nationalism and immigration

'As a nationalist, you will identify certain threats to your Flemish-nationalist environment. What we identify right now as that threat, or at least a negative effect, are immigrants coming here with their own cultural luggage. That may lead to a clash. [...] And yes, our conservative stance is that we want to preserve our own Flemish traditions, language and culture. Tendencies affecting those, we indeed view as negative. In Antwerp, more than half of the children between 0 and 6 do not speak Dutch at home, so this has a negative impact on the pre-existence of the Dutch language. Language is one of the main aspects in which nations can be distinguished. Imagine the entire world would speak a mixture of all languages, then we could not use it as an argument to become independent anymore. Another point are for example the cultural issues. These are affected by immigrants, that want to introduce their own cultural visions. So as NSV, we are not in favor of the multicultural society, because it derogates what makes every nation so beautiful.'[45]

The non-Western immigrant

The interview fragment in the box above summarizes broadly why most of the NSV-members I interviewed allegedly oppose immigration: eventually, the world is turning into into a globalist multicultural, in which no different identity groups can distinguish

---

[44] Interview Richard, 20 May 2019, Ghent.
[45] Interview Cornel, 2 May 2019, Ghent.

themselves anymore from others, turning the world into a grey pulp of co-existing individuals that have no connection with each other. The result of immigration, says Koen (NSV!), is a lot of ethnic groups living together that clash with each other. No ethnic group is happy because everything is just a mix of everyone. By mixing it all up we will eventually get a globalist monoculture, in which every city and country looks the same. 'Like Las Vegas: there are pretty things to see, but it is all fake.'[46] According to most of the NSV! members, having different ethnic groups in the world is the real beauty of it. When they visit different countries, they want to see, do and eat things that are typical for that particular culture. Their main fear is that the whole world will have the same kind of globalist, progressive culture, in which national identity groups cannot be distinguished anymore. Assuming that one derives his or her social identity from the connection to a larger group, their negative attitude can arguably be viewed as a symptom of the urge for the uniqueness of their group in relation to other groups. After all, the fear that the members describe is becoming one and the same people, so it is the urge to be able to distinguish themselves from others that is at the foundation of their negative view of immigration. In this sense, Flemish ethnicity is not only the urge to be able to distinguish themselves from others.

The above described gives a clear example of the perceived boundaries between nations. Within these perceptions, us-them distinctions can be found, by which the Flemish group identity is defined. The symbolic boundary is primarily drawn along the lines of ethnicities. It is implicit, that those with other cultural backgrounds are a threat to the preservation of the Flemish identity group. Although the interviews have pointed out that Wallonians, for example, are not unfit to integrate in Flemish society, it is primarily non-Western immigrants that form a threat to Flanders and its culture. As Gaston (NSV!) argues:

If you take up people from the Third World, either from Africa or the Middle East, they have different religions and different histories. They come from different cultures. The easiest example is Islam. For those people it is a shock to come here, to see how we live. That is easily imaginable. That's why it is important to focus on people that agree with our culture, because we are clearly taking in too many that don't accept it. And if you don't put effort on assimilation or integration, nothing will

---

[46] Interview Koen, 1 May 2019, Ghent.

change. These people form Ghetto's, in which they live isolated, and only meet with people of their own kind. For example in Molenbeek or Anderlecht. If they come out of their neighbourhoods they clash with our culture. You cannot expect them to integrate if you don't put effort in it.[47]

The outgroup identified by Gaston are primarily defined in their cultural backgrounds. Again, the importance of having a shared history is used to define the own group. The immigrants are ascribed certain rules of membership, which immigrants have to abide, which is agreeing with the Flemish culture. To the question why he identifies as a Flemish-nationalist, Harold (S&V) replies that his feeling of Flemishness has gotten stronger since he obtained his driver's license, because

When I drive and I see a middle aged woman driving in the cheapest car without options, and I see a foreigner in a bright red BMW, I ask myself, how is this possible? They get out and cannot even speak Dutch. I wonder why a woman who has lived here for years, worked hard, cannot pay a car, and someone from abroad can. If you look at the amount of people that come to Belgium of which after two years only 1 percent works, and 2 percent has said 'yes I want to work', it makes me wonder why we let people in. [...] If a Polish person says tomorrow: "I want to become Belgian", than that is fine for me. But then you have to live here, learn Dutch, work here, and behave here as a normal person. Then you won't drive through Antwerp with 120 km/h en shout things at people or whatever I see happening. There are many who act normally, but a lot don't. [...] If you cannot behave I would say, put them on a plane and fly them back.[48]

Harold's anecdote evidently contains a clear boundary between the Fleming and an outsider, which has to commit to several rules of membership in order to become part of the Flemish society: learn Dutch, work and live here, behaving *normally* (my emphasis), which are also the main terms for Ewald: 'It is about a good integration, behaving like a good human being and willing to help society move forward. If you do those things, work like everyone else, not

---

[47] Author's interview with Gaston on 22 May at a cafe near the train station in Leuven.
[48] Interview Harold, 18 April 2019, Leuven.

abusing the system by being ill or work illegally, then you are a Fleming to me.'[49] Thus, for Ewald and Harold, Flemish identity is not ethnic per se, in the sense that people with other perceived descents *can* become Flemish. However, most of my participants consider successful integration as a leftist utopia, and do not believe in the multicultural society. Michael (KVHV) agrees that feeling Flemish is only a part of Flemishness, he states it is also genetically determined: a Turkish person that comes to live in Flanders cannot become a Fleming. In our interview, a clear example of a boundary and how the - in this case Muslim - identity group negatively affects the Flemish identity.

> There are only coming more, white people do not get children anymore, Muslims do. We might very well be the last generation of Flemings. That is bad, because then we are the endpoint of million years of evolution. With what goal? Then it was all for nothing.[50]

Michael creates a very clear us-them dichotomy, between Muslims on the one hand, and white Western people on the other, while at the same time emphasizing that the disappearing white population had a goal, which is now sabotaged by the influx of Muslims into Europe. The effect the outgroup has on the ingroup is thus considered destructive. In in this respect, Michael derives his social identity from the larger entity of the 'white population', which is defined oppositional to a group of non-whites and primarily Muslims that settle in Europe. KVHV-member Richard agrees:

> We are reeling in a very dominant culture. We are being 'outbred' by them. And we even promote not to make children. The biggest problem is immigration from outside of Europe. There is more similarity with people from inside of Europe. We went to Romania this summer. I felt at home there. Politically we were on the same page with those people. They have a homogeneous society, and they completely trust each other. You can only have that in a homogeneous society. At the festival we went to, I did not

---

[49] Interview Ewald, 23 May 2019, Oostende.
[50] Author's interview with Michael on 29 May 2019 at Cafe Marimain in Ghent.

see fights, nor women that got intimidated. You can leave your door open, you cannot imagine doing that here.[51]

Again, the us-them divide is evident, as is the effect the outgroup has. Also, Richard uncovers the Flemish identity is rooted in a larger European Catholic identity, which is threatened as a whole by Muslims. So, not only ethnicity is an important symbolic boundary, often times religion is used to redefine the own social group. Second, there is a very clear interpretation about the correlation between social unrest or even criminal behavior, and the degree of homogeneity of the society. This way, the destabilizing effect on the Western society by people color is emphasized, for example by pointing to the fact that 13 percent of the Afro-Americans in the United States are responsible for 50 per cent of the criminal offences, 'I don't think that is different here.'[52] Thus the characteristics of the Fleming are in this way defined as non-criminal, European, white and embedded within Catholicism. The Catholic-Islam dichotomy is one primarily defined by KVHV-members, which are predominantly Catholic, although when discussing immigration, Flemish culture is often defined as Catholic also by non-religious individuals.

So while most of my participants view immigration as a large threat to Flemish identity, a large majority thinks the problem is more fundamental. Immigration would not be possible if this was not widely accepted and promoted by 'leftist progressivism'. This brings us to the final out-group that is defined by my participants that threatens Flemish identity, which brings forward some other aspects underlying Flemishness.

The progressivist

A large part of my interviewees holds the same group of people responsible for the current problems in Flanders, Belgium and Europe: roughly, they are described as the establishment, leftists-progressivists, globalists elites or Generation May '68. To start with the latter, May '68 was a response to the conservative culture in Western-Europe, dominated by the church.

But the shift was way too radical. Self hate increased in Europe. Before May '68, Europe was the engine of the world. We put a man on the moon, we abolished

---

[51] Interview Richard, 20 May 2019, Ghent.
[52] Ibidem.

slavery, we created technology, modern medicine. After may '68 the West was responsible for all the bad things in the world: colonialism, hunger, every war was our fault and people talked us into a collective sense of guilt.[53]

Here, we can identify a shift from specifically the Flemish identity that is under threat, to a more western-European identity that is in danger. As Dries (KVHV) says, the current problems exceed the Flemish borders, nowadays there are 'culture wars' everywhere in the world.[54] But contrary to the Wallonians, who were not perceived a real threat because they intrude in the country, or the non-Western immigrants that come from outside, the progressivism is a worldwide phenomenon, and at the same time a threat from within. The us-them dichotomy that is created is one between Dries calls the current situation an experiment of May '68. 'In May '68, they tried to cut our roots and erase our identity in order to construct a new multicultural, socialist, utopian society'.[55] According to Koen (NSV!) it was the hippie generation that wanted to renew the world. They lost the connection with their history, for example by destroying classical buildings using modern architecture. Herein, many of my participants identify this generation as being very hypocrite, because they 'May '68 has been the best generation in molesting its own culture [...] It is the generation that chained itself to nuclear reactors, but at the same time calls us fascists.'[56] The boundaries that are drawn with this group, are thus not based on ethnicity or religion, rather, they are defined in terms of age and political preference: 't is a generation that does not get the youth, let alone internet. They are considered to be very politically correct, always seeking to blame the West for everything.'[57] According to Richard (KVHV) they grew up in easy times. They have had all the benefits, but no burdens. They installed progressivism and ruined everything, resulting in the fact that Flemish culture is non-existent anymore. And as Dries (KVHV) goes, 'We are dealing with the consequences now. People have no identity, nothing to hold on to, Catholicism is completely gone, as is the Flemish identity. [...] Right now, we carry the consequences. The youth is characterized by nihilism and doesn't know what to do.'[58]

---

[53] Interview Dries, 4 April 2019, Brussels.
[54] Ibidem.
[55] Ibidem.
[56] Interview Koen, 1 May 2019, Ghent.
[57] Ibidem.
[58] Interview Dries, 4 April 2019, Brussels.

Participants do not always point to the Generation May '68 as responsible for the status quo, some haven't mentioned them, some define a broader 'establishment' or 'leftist' group, which include journalists, academics, judges and most of the policymakers. KVHV-member Michael identifies a group of globalist elites, that since the end of the Great War tries to impose a world government gradually, via institutions such as the League of Nations and its successor the United Nations. According to him, cultural-marxists and capitalists de facto work together to take people's basic structures away. These people are actively busy with the '*omvolking*' - roughly translated as re-population - of Europe. The white European, the primordial inhabitant of the continent is in decline, and this also happens in the United States and Australia, for reasons of cheap labour and an ideal of progressivism. [59] So, all members define social boundaries between a group of leftist elites and their own social identity group. Herein, the main dichotomy is conservatism versus progressivism. The participants differ to the extents they share conservative values, but for many of them it is an important aspect, because not being conservative leads to amorality, which is a threat to Flemish identity. 'Conservatism means respecting traditions and trying to preserve them. [...] If you are not conservative, you will become individualistic, resulting in an individualist state and society. Then people only start worrying about their own problems, while you have to work together to build a stronger society.'[60] The elites try, for various identified reasons, to impose progressive values on Flanders and one of the main ways in which this progressivist tendencies is expressed, is imposed and even forced multiculturalism.

So, what different meanings and perceptions of Flemishness are present among the members of the different organizations? I have found that a wide range of ideas relating to Flemish identity are present. In order show the multiplicity of the social identity of the participants, I have highlighted the three most important groups which members relate Flemish and their own identity to. After all, people often define themselves, by defining who they are not. As has become clear above, there is a lot of overlap and a lot of diversity between the perceptions of Flemish identity and culture among the different members of the far-right wing groups that were interviewed. Looking back at the definition of social identity, which is about the emphasis on the similarities with one group and differences with other groups, it

---

[59] Interview with Michael, 29 May 2019, Ghent.
[60] Interview Ewald, 23 May 2019, Ghent.

may not be a surprising conclusion that among my interviewees there is no uniform definition of Flemish identity. Conceptions of Flemish behaviour differ between behavioral aspects, such as particular work ethics and speaking Dutch, to something that is rooted in a person's DNA and culture. For the KVHV-members, Catholicism is identified as a key element of a larger European identity, of which also the Flemish identity is part. Several other members also identified this Catholic aspect, but this mainly came forward when Muslims were discussed, also by non-religious participants. NSV!-members generally are more focused on the other aspects of identity, such as shared values, communal history and traditions. Some members pointed to material objects, such as architecture, to define Flemishness. What clearly binds my participants, is that they, to different extents, identify the same groups as apparent threats to Flemish identity. The remainder of this research will shed light on the ways in which these boundaries and perceived collective identities come to life in the contentious repertoire of the organizations.

Chapter 4 The Repertoire of the flamingant radical-right

In the previous chapter the diversity, plurality and multiplicity of social identity conceptions have been explored, while at the same time it provided showing the commonalities among members of the different organizations by defining what they oppose. This chapter has several goals. First, it answers the sub-question what the repertoire of the new radical right consists of. Second, it looks at contentious acts through a dramaturgical lense, in order to establish an image of how meaning is displayed. Alexander's framework will be used as the foundation to answer the second question of this chapter: What cultural materials are used to express and reinforce collective identities during public performances? It builds on the collective identity groups and symbolic boundaries identified in the previous chapter, to show what claims of identity, and what perceptions become visible during cultural performances. In other words, it looks not only at what, but also at how conceptions of collective identities and group boundaries are expressed in the social movements' protest and claim-making culture.

Contentious repertoires

Let's remind ourselves of Tilly and Tarrow's (2015) conceptualization of contentious politics: These are about actors making public claims, using performances drawn from existing action repertoires and adding new performances to them, forging alliances with entities with the same goals and creating opportunities for themselves.

> The social movement repertoire includes an array of claim-making performances that activists usually employ in sets of two or more: formation of special-purpose claim-making associations and coalitions, public meetings, petition drives, street demonstrations, vigils, rallies, public statements, and lobbying of political authorities.
>
> (Tilly 2006: 122)

Tilly's outline of the repertoire social movements make use of is a great starting point for this analysis. What can be identified in the action repertoire of the new radical right, is that it is

characterized by a combination of older forms of protest, while at the same time they adopt and construct new methods of protest using primarily technological innovation. The first, more traditional type of performances used by the movements are rallies, vigils and protest marches. The most important examples of these are the March against Marrakesh, organized by KVHV, NSV!, Schild & Vrienden and others; the March for Democracy, organized by Schild & Vrienden; and the marches respectively for remigration and against the farm killings in South-Africa organized by NSV!. A second type of performance, I would define as spontaneous spatial contestations. This type of protest is inspired by other European identitarians. During the action 'Defend Europe: mission Alpes' by several dozens of members of the French branch of the identitarians, they blocked migrants that tried to cross the border to France. They unrolled a banner reading 'Closed Border, You will not make Europe home, No way, Back to your homeland' (Generation Identitaire 2018). The German branch gained widespread international media attention with their 'Defend Europe' action, during which members navigated a large ship in the mediterranean sea to prevent and hinder NGO-ships from picking up migrants (Identitäre Bewegung 2018). The 'Protecting our heritage' performance of Schild & Vrienden fits in this claim-making genre. An essential element of this form of protest is successful social media presence of the movement. All the examples mentioned above have been edited professionally and shared widely on social media. This brings me to the third and final type of contention the movements members engage in, which I define as everyday claim-making. This is done both on- and offline, and can entail a wide range of acts. The most important ones are sharing memes, sharing videos, applying stickers, applying posters, but also wearing merchandise or clothing. It is low-threshold, because every member -and even non-members- have the means to engage in it, without making much effort.

In sum, more traditional types of claim-making such as applying posters or texts - Luther jumps to mind - in the physical world, are combined with new types of protest that are predominantly facilitated by and spread in the digital environment, primarily on social media. For Schild & Vrienden, social media presence is very important, in this sense, there is significant overlap with the alternative right in the United States, which is famous for its online presence and political memes. It is less for NSV! and KVHV.

Now we have established how the movements make claims, it is time to move to a more in-depth analysis of several of these acts using performance theory, to see how symbolic

boundaries between identity groups are enacted. Before engaging in analysis, Alexander's (2006) components of cultural performances will briefly be revisited. The performance is situated in a system of collective representation, as Alexander calls it, which consists of the background symbols and foreground scripts (2006: 33). The former is about the more historical-cultural setting serving as the foundation, the meaning system of the performance. In the previous chapter it became evident that the Flemish-nationalist ideology and the accompanying Flemish identity is the main commonality among the movements' members. Since all the movements are focused on the emancipation of the Flemish, the central background system of meanings is embedded in common Flemish history. Thus, in the case of the Flemish movement the background representation can in the broadest sense be described as a context of Flemish-nationalism and the struggle for emancipation of the Flemish people. It is this grand narrative, this meaning system, in which the organizations situate themselves.

The foreground scripts, are the more concrete narratives and traditions that are employed in order to bring structure and meaning to the background representation. 'They translate the background symbols into present-day relevant ones' (Alexander 2006: 33). In this case, these scripts can consist of existing stories, issues, symbols, traditions, myths et cetera that are related to the emancipation of the Flemish people and Flemish-nationalism in itself, translated into present-day issues. These systems of collective representation must come to life, they have to to be dramatized by by actors, and these actors need audiences for whom they can perform. To project their meaning in a convincing manner, actors make use of material things, props, that help to make the narrative come to life, which Alexander calls means of symbolic production (2006: 35). The *mise-en-scène,* finally, entails how all the different components are put together in a play: the dramatization of the referential texts by actors in front of an audience using symbolic means, including the temporal sequencing and spatial choreography (Alexander 2006: 35). The first section of this chapter, the analysis of a Schild & Vrienden protest act, will serve to show step-by-step how the elements of Alexander's framework can be used in order to deconstruct a performance. The analysis will further show what meanings of Flemish identity are performed, and which outgroups can be identified.

4.1 Spatial contestation: 'Protecting our heritage'

'I filmed during the Gravensteen protest. I found that very interesting, a very cool experience actually and I met a lot of people there. People that, yeah, you get to know in a different way than the average student during nightlife. You really experience something together, something that is different than drinking a beer together.'[61]

On the 8th of March 2018 a video appeared on the Schild & Vrienden Facebook page, showing members of the movement disturbing a pro-immigration protest in the city center of Ghent. In order to provide a comprehensive analysis, a brief description of the content of the 2.47 minute long video is necessary.

The video opens with Schild & Vrienden leader Van Langenhove walking down a street, while over the course of his monologue he is accompanied by an increasing amount of young men, that first greet each other before they walk behind the main actor. He, Van Langenhove, explains that the movement takes action today to protect the Flemish cultural heritage and to secure their future. The narrative - or the storyline - of the video is that 'leftist subsidised groups want to take the Gravensteen castle in Ghent, because for them the castle symbolizes Fortress Europe (Schild & Vrienden 2018)'. These groups allegedly want to attract hundreds of millions of new illegal migrants, that have no future here. That way, 'they endanger our future and the future of the entire European continent'. Schild & Vrienden 'wants to show that the Flemish youth cares about its future, and won't allow it's cultural heritage to be abused by spreading leftist open border propaganda, and that the Flemish youth stands up for one another'. After this opening scene, the video cuts to what almost appears to be a scene from an action movie. Uplifting music strikes up while the castle with the 'Europe, it can be different'-flag is shown, after which we see Schild & Vrienden members struggling with protesters from the other side that try to stop them from tearing down the flag on top of the castle. Next, Schild & Vrienden members succeed in their plan and rush towards the flag to tear it down. In the next shot a protester from the opposite party is shown who seems to be threatening a Schild & Vrienden member. In a further shot we see Dries decline a journalist who asks a question, because he does not want fake news to be produced. When the group walks away in the following shot, they chant 'Vliegt den Blauwvoet! Storm op zee!' and

---

[61] Author's interview with Gaston on 22 May 2019 at a cafe near the train station in Leuven.

'Linkse ratten, rolt uw matten!'. The video ends with Dries explaining that the leftist protesters were all older people, living in a dream that a multicultural society can be established with open borders, reeling in 300 million Africans, but that according to Schild & Vrienden that will be a failure. This is why they had to take action and literally tore that dream apart.
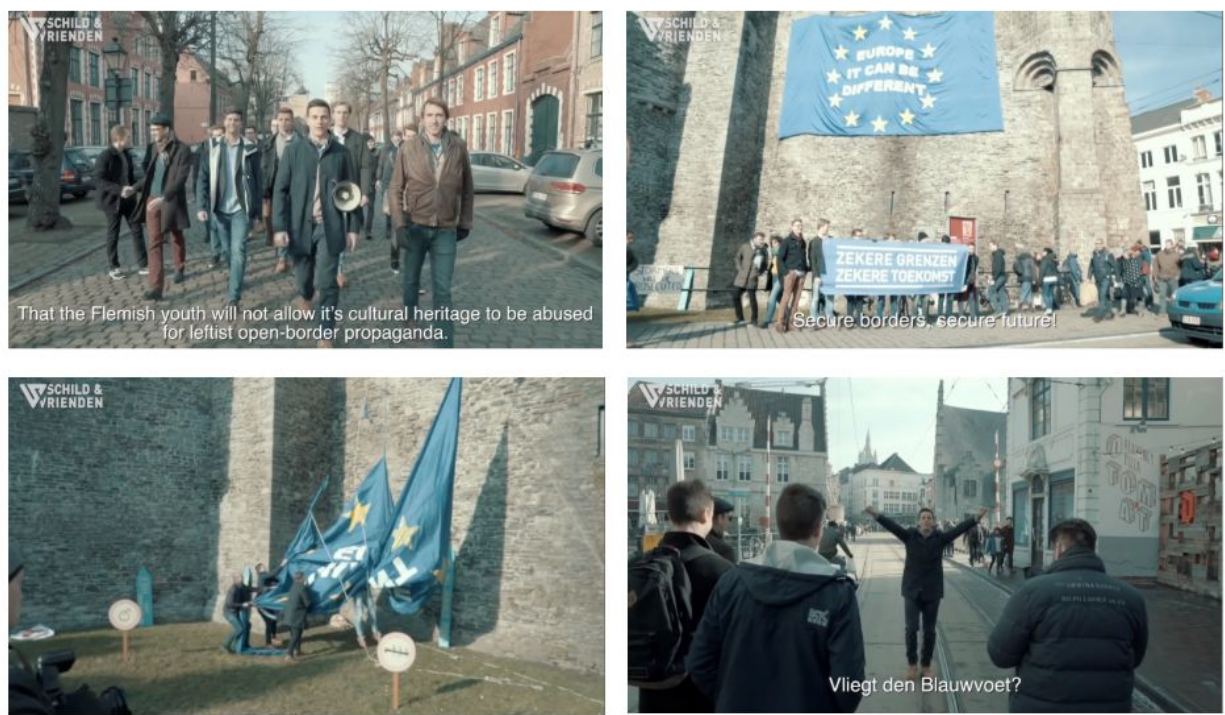

Figure 2. Schild & Vrienden. (8th of March 2019). Stills from *Schild & Vrienden defends Gravensteen from open-border activists.*

The storyline is not difficult to identify: the Flemish youth, represented by the group of young men joining the protest, will not accept abuse of their cultural heritage. That the protest action is embedded in a Flemish-nationalist frame, becomes visible in Van Langenhove's monologue during the beginning of the video. He makes references to the Flemish cultural heritage that needs to be protected, the Flemish youth that wants to do so. This is an excellent example of how the meaning system of Flemish nationalism is linked to the present. This background representation of Flemish-nationalism is connected to the present-day resiliency of the Flemish youth, and their willingness to protect 'their' cultural heritage against left-wing protesters on the one hand, and against illegal immigrants on the other, explicitly Africans, coming to Europe. The identitarian dichotomy between the in-group and out-group

is recognizable from the start. On the one hand, resilient Flemish youth, on the other, the (African) illegal immigrant, who is not welcome here. To present the background system of the Flemish-nationalist tradition into the referential world, the foreground script includes chants. The chant 'Vliegt den Blauwvoet! Storm op zee' refers to a song that is traditionally used in the Flemish student movement. It was made popular by Albrecht Rodenbach, one of the first student leaders that primarily protested against the French language in Flemish universities in the late 19th century. It is still widely used in the Flemish movement. The chant 'leftist rats, roll your mats' is adopted from the lyrics of a folk song from the Napoleonic age, in which the French are replaced by the leftists, referring to the Flemish uprising against the French. It is unlikely that it is coincidental that both chants refer to the historical resilience of the Flemish people. By placing these chants in a present-day context, the historical Flemish-nationalist background system of meanings is linked to the present activities of Schild & Vrienden.

The actors of the performance consist of Van Langenhove as the lead, while he also functions as narrator providing the explanation of why the Flemish youth takes action. The young Schild & Vrienden members all play different parts. Some of them storm the castle to cut down the pro-immigration banner, while others stand in front of the castle showing their own flag. There is also an important role for the opposing protesters. They are filmed while they allegedly, according to the subtitles 'try to push the cameraman of the wall', say things like "dirty fascists, fuck off' or 'You are going to hit the ground hard'. Depicting these protesters as such, it is imaginable that viewers of the video may sympathize with the action of Schild & Vrienden. Furthermore, for viewers, it confirms that the identity group that in the previous chapter has been labeled as 'progressivists', are indeed threatening the Flemish nation by protesting for open borders, whilst simultaneously showing unsympathetic characteristics. So again, the video depicts a clear symbolic boundary between in- and outgroup.

A wide array of means of symbolic production expressing these identity boundaries can be identified, not only material objects, but also locations are included. To start off with the latter, one can argue that two essential symbolic locations can be distinguished. The first obviously is the castle, symbolizing the Flemish cultural heritage. As Van Langenhove mentions, for the pro-immigration protesters the castle symbolizes 'Fortress Europe' in which immigrants are denied access. The Schild & Vrienden members basically play along with this

metaphor, but instead of promoting a more humane immigration policy, they want to better secure the European borders, represented by the castle walls. In this sense, the symbolic, imagined boundaries suddenly exist in the physical world. Since means of symbolic productions are defined as 'things that allow symbolic projections to be made', the internet, more specifically the Schild & Vrienden social media pages may also be seen as a distinct location. The video was edited professionally and subtitled in English, so it could be shared across the Belgian borders, and with success. The Schild & Vrienden video was viewed over 230.000 times on the movement's Facebook page and 157.000 on its Youtube channel (Schild & Vrienden Facebook 2018; Youtube 2018).[62] Online visibility is an essential part of the collective identity of the movement.

In the video there are different material objects identifiable that help to communicate the message of Schild & Vrienden. Flags are probably the most widely used props to express national identities, both in the world as in the Flemish movement. Both the banners - the 'against' Fortress Europe, reading: Europe, it can be different, as the Schild & Vrienden banner, reading: Secure borders, secure future - are material props used to perform beliefs and quite literally asks for boundaries and widens the frame to protect the European identity from outsiders. Cutting down the counter-protesters flag and trying to replace it with the latter can also be interpreted as a symbolic claim.

4.2 Marches and rallies

The dramaturgical analysis of the Schild & Vrienden video has shown how the cultural performance framework can help to deconstruct acts of contention into different parts, in order to show the cultural meanings they carry. It has briefly outlined how the background structure of Flemish-nationalism lies at the foundation of the Schild & Vrienden protest. How Flemish identity is enacted in the rest of the repertoire becomes clear in the remainder of this chapter.

The next personal anecdote is one of my own experiences I encountered during fieldwork. I attended two rallies of the political party Flemish Interest where Van Langenhove was a

---

[62] The number of views on 11-07-2019. The number of views is probably higher, but the video was deleted by Youtube because it was reported, after which it was reuploaded.

speaker. since he was the leading candidate of the party in one of the Flemish provinces. During the first one, I would estimate there were around 200 people present. The topic was Freedom of Speech, primarily the lack of it in Belgium and Europe. It serves to describe the ambiance during these rallies, and it is an illustration for central characteristics of physical rallies and marches, during which actors display meaning for a physical audience.

Box 2. Free Speech Meeting

The venture in which the rally took place was already packed half an hour before it started. It was a cosy, informal atmosphere, in which people were drinking and talking loudly. Most of them seemed hyped-up and energetic. The public was diverse in age and appearance, not in skin color. A lot of elderly people were present, but also young families and Schild & Vrienden members, easily recognizable in their shirts. What stood out was that during the speeches, the audience actively participated in the performance, showing their emotions. This including a lot of applauding, booing, chanting. All speakers were introduced in smooth and professional looking montages that were viewed on a large screen, accompanied with uplifting music. The contents of the speeches primarily involved the islamization and clash of cultures in Europe, and the elites and establishment facilitating this. The elite academics, journalists and politicians were constantly blamed for the current problems. Some of the speakers, such as the English journalist and political activist Tommy Robinson also directly addressed journalists and academics to stop spreading misinformation, which was applauded by the audience. Standing among the supporters with my bloc note and my recording device in my hand, this raised quite an uncomfortable feeling.[63]

The uncomfortable feeling that it raised is illustrative for the ways such events actually make audiences experience social boundaries, in this case between me as an allegedly left-wing academic and my fellow leftist journalists in the room - facilitating the political elite to stay in power - and the Flemish people which are done with the islamization, multicultural society and the political correctness. The division between me and them suddenly felt very tangible and real. The most evident social boundaries that were performed were those between the

---

[63] Author's fieldnotes, Freedom of Speech meeting in Zaal Bart in Antwerp on 16 March 2019.

59

elites in society and the 'Flemish ordinary people', but also between cultures from outside and the Flemish people. The Flemish identity group was represented by a fair amount of Flemish flags, the national anthem that was sung, and the rhythmical chanting of slogans like 'Eigen Volk Eerst!' (Our People First!). Evidently, these cultural materials were not solely used during this particular event, but are rather returning elements of meetings and protests of the new radical right. While NSV! and KVHV were not involved in the above described rally - in fact, they distance themselves from party politics -, similar dynamics can be identified observing the March against Marrakesh, which we will now turn to.

The March against Marrakesh

> *'It was cool to see that it were not the typical people that got out on the streets. There was a lot of youth, many families, elderly. You really saw that people felt this was something we have to stand up for.'*[64]

In December 2018 KVHV initiated the March against Marrakesh, to protest against the UN Immigration Pact which would allegedly give immigrants and refugees a legal base to settle in Europe more easy. Over seven thousand people joined the march, under which members of Schild & Vrienden, NSV! and KVHV. Members of different nationalist organizations were also represented and of course a lot of individuals that were not connected to any movement, but sympathized with the cause of the march.

The idea for this march came from the founder of the meme page 'Make Vlaenderen Great Again', a Flemish-nationalist oriented Facebook page with over thirteen thousand followers. He was convinced that something needed to be done against the pact, so among his followers he checked whether such a march would have support. People responded fairly positive. At the time, Ewald was a candidate member of the student association KVHV-Ghent, which saw great potential in the idea. Since they had a larger network, Ewald decided to involve them in the organization. Because of his large network and his membership at KVHV-Ghent, Schild & Vrienden leader Van Langenhove was also involved in the organization, who on his turn involved multiple other movements that were active in the Flemish movement. Among them were *Voorpost* and *Flemish Interest Jongeren,*. NSV!

---

[64] Interview Gaston, 22 April 2019, Leuven.

and all KVHV departments but the one in Leuven got involved.[65] As board member of KVHV-Ghent at the time, Michael was involved a lot in the organization which boosted his spirit, 'making a decision just like that, and the entire county is in commotion, fantastic, casually mobilizing ten thousand people'.[66] A demonstration of this proportion, organized by members of the Flemish movement had not taken place in decades. This contentious act, in which multiple affiliated organizations worked together to mobilize a significant amount of people, using modern technological means - read social media - to call potential adherents to action, is typical for contemporary protest. Through the Facebook event page, 139.266 people were invited, 12.161 ticked the box 'attending', and 35.295 people were interested in the event. In short, the mobilization capacity of the different organizations was quite substantial.

Figure 3. Still from (Hans Verreyt). (2018, 16 December). *Toespraken Mars tegen Marrakesh*.

Let us now turn to an analysis of the march from a dramaturgical perspective.[67] As observed in the 'Protecting our heritage' protest, storylines play an essential role in the communication of the message. The earlier referred to construction of emotional collectives are relevant to

---

[65] Interview Ewald, 23 May 2019, Oostende.
[66] Interview Michael, 29 May 2019, Ghent.
[67] The analysis is based on multiple Youtube videos from different uploaders (RT 2018; Yvette A. 2018. ; Yvanos Cameraman 2018; Hans Verreyt 2018; Schild & Vrienden 2018).

understand how the different individuals and organizations become one. In this respect, Eyerman (2006) discusses cognitive frames, which consist of narrative structures that focus and move actions and emotions in particular directions:

> Narratives are stories containing rhetorical devices, story lines, which link a particular occurence/experience to others, broadening their meaning beyond the situational, imposing a higher order of significance, thus orchestrating and amplifying both the emotional experience and the meaning of the event, as individuals fused into a collective, with a purposive future and a meaningful past.
>
> (2006, 196)

So constructing a collective, happens by displaying a communal purpose and a shared meaning of events, in which the boundaries between individuals become blurred. Personal identities disappear into the background, which is emphasized by the different speakers during the march: everyone on that square has the same goal, 'whether you are wearing a yellow vest or a Flemish lion'.[68] The social movement identity becomes less important, and while the speakers from KVHV and NSV! still wear their caps and ribbons, and flags of their associations are waving in the audience, these do not solely function to promote their own association, rather they are an expression of Flemishness. All the individuals on the square are fused in the larger Flemish-nationalist collective identity.

Linking back to Alexander's framework, these storylines connect the background structures and foreground scripts: narratives often emphasize the historical situatedness of contemporary issues. Underlying these narratives are us-them divides, in- and outgroups are identified, and the effect of the outgroups on the ingroups is set forth. During the March against Marrakesh speeches these processes are observable. As Alexander defines the performance: the meaning of one's social situation is displayed. The first speech of NSV!-president Otto van Malderen illustrates how a clear us-them dichotomy is constructed, portraying in detail what effect the outgroup has on the ingroup. He blames the 'oikophobe'[69]

---

[68] Speech of Flemish Interest Youth chairman Bart Claes during the March against Marrakesh on 16 December 2018 in Brussels.

[69] The term oikophobia stems from the old-Greek words oikos, meaning home and phobos, meaning fear. It refers to the fear and aversion of the self. In Dutch speaking countries the term was popularized

lobbyists of NGO's and the 'submissive politicians' for the creation of the migration pact.[70] He continues by reflecting the emotions of the audience: 'You are angry, worried or concerned about the world your children will grow up in'. This is an attempt to orchestrate and amplify the collective emotions experienced during the protest. After this, he explains how the political establishment feels about the people present: 'They do not like you! You are all renegades, stubborn weeds that need to be destroyed, no matter what'.[71] The divide is evident: elitist politicians versus the resilient Flemish protester. Furthermore, the metaphor comparing protesters to weeds can be considered a rhetorical device that is used to create a stronger drama and a stronger perceived divide between the two groups.

Most of the different speakers make certain claims about Flemish identity, while at the same time identifying outgroups that threaten Flanders. One of the most illustrating examples of this is found in the speech of Van Langenhove, which is received with the loudest applause. He first turns to the journalists, and states that their time is up. He blames them for being the lapdogs of the establishment and the hounds of cultural Marxism, that hunt down everyone who makes an effort to preserve their nation. Next, he addresses the audience and the 'potentially millions of Flemings that are with [them] in their minds' to ask themselves the question:

> What sacrifices have you made? What are you prepared to do to be able to look your children and grandchildren in their eyes when they ask: what have you done to give us a future in *this* country? For the people that do not believe that our country will survive these dark times with traitors as politicians, and the all-destroying mass immigration: do no forget you are Flemish, that you are European, that you are from a breed that comes from a darker place, that struggled in the factories and fought on the battlefield to preserve our freedom and our uniqueness. It is our damn obligation to them, and all the other Flemish generations to protect our freedom and uniqueness.

---

by the right-wing politician Thierry Baudet (2013) in his work *Oikofobie,* in which he problematizes the tendency of Western cultures to neglect and dislike their own nation and heritage. The concept has been adopted in the political discourse of Flemish Interest. Besides, several participants of my research told me reading Baudets work was part of their initiation period in their movement, back in 2014.

[70] Speech of NSV-President Otto van Malderen during the March against Marrakesh on 16 December 2018 in Brussels.

[71] Ibidem.

We have all the tools. Don't let them tell you lies that mass migration is an all-time phenomenon, that these people appear out of nowhere here in Brussels. That is a lie from the journalists and politicians, that have no other goal than to deconstruct all what makes Flanders Flemish, and what makes Europe European. Those that tell you that migration is an uncontrollable phenomenon, are the same people that consciously reeled in millions of people to our country.[72]

This piece of identity work links the past to the present, by ascribing the historical Fleming the same ideals as the protesters today, namely: preserving the uniqueness and freedom of the country. While it is difficult to measure whether the Flemings in the World Wars fought to preserve uniqueness or would support the causes of today's protesters, the narrative of having the same goal as the Flemish people throughout history creates an even stronger feeling of a shared purpose, since it implies this purpose has always been around. The 'all-destroying mass immigration' that involves reeling in *millions of people*, that is done by 'traitor politicians' functions in this narrative as the weapon of the latter to destroy all that is Flemish. Thus, the us-them dichotomy between the Flemish on one hand, and the millions of immigrants and politicians on the other hand, is very strong. Mainly, because the effect that the out-group has on the ingroup is of huge significance: it is all-destroying.

Another characteristic of a convincing narrative distinguished by Eyerman (2006), is that it links past, presence and future. In the case of this speech, it links the Flemish soldier that sacrificed himself so the nation could continue to exist, to the present, in which the Fleming has the obligation to both that sacrificed soldier as to the future generation to preserve what is threatened. By emphasizing this shared purpose over different generations, it automatically places individuals in a shared system of meaning, larger than their own individual identity. This background structure of meanings involving the Flemish resilience is thus connected to the contemporary problems revolving around mass-immigration and corrupt politicians seeking to destroy the nation. Other foreground symbols that are constantly used during the march, are the chants. 'Linkse ratten, rol uw matten', 'Eigen volk eerst', 'Vliegt den blauwvoet, storm op zee', 'Islamieten, parasieten' strongly reinforce the distinction between in- and outgroups: the own 'Flemish' population versus Islamists and

---

[72] Speech of Dries Van Langenhove during the March against Marrakesh on 16 December 2018 in Brussels.

leftists. In addition, spatial choreography of the march further emphasizes the dichotomy between the political elite on one hand, and the population -*het volk*- on the other: the *Schumanplein,* the square where the speeches were held lies in the middle of different buildings that house European institutions such as the Council of Europe and the European Commission. So metaphorically speaking, the participants on the square find themselves in the lion's den, which is emphasized during the speeches. Thus, staging the performance on the particular square and in the streets of Brussels serves as a method to make us-them divides observable and tangible, by means of the built environment.[73]

NSV!: Silent March and ReMigration March

Annually, the NSV! departments organize a protest march. In 2018, NSV! organized a silent march through the streets of Ghent to raise attention for the attacks on South African farms, in which white farmers, Afrikaners, the Boers, were robbed and killed. The march was joined by NSV! members, Voorpost members, Schild & Vrienden members, KVHV-members and more. The Afrikaners are the white farmer population in South-Africa. Most of the NSV! members feel closely connected to them and see them as closely related people, or even as the same nation.

Figure 4. Still from *NSV! Stille Mars - Stop de genocide op blanke boeren*

---

[73] 'Spatial phenomena ... are made by materials which are in space - but which also have spatial effects' (Law and Hetherington 2000: 36 in Leitner et al. 2008: 158). For more detailed knowledge on spatiality in relation to contentious politics, Leitner et al. their work serves as solid foundation.

The previous chapter has showed how among a lot of Flemish-nationalists, the fusion of Flanders and the Netherlands into Dietsland is the main goal of their nationalism. Within this Diets identity, the white part of the South-African population is also considered a part. The march can thus be interpreted as a reinforcement of (NSV!)-Koen's perception of identity, which is the *Diets* idea that the Netherlands, South-Africa and Flanders are one and the same people. (Here the Dutch word *volk* is used.) This identity is dramatized in the form of a silent march. The means that are used to do this are the waving of the flags of NSV! The protesters wear their traditional student outfits, and they carry a banner reading 'Stop the genocide on white farmers'. Besides, on this banner there is a short sentence in the South African language. Saying: 'Ons sal dit oorleef'. (We will survive this). In this way the brotherhood and connection with the 'fellow-folk' is emphasized once again. In May 2019, the NSV! organized the ReMigration March. The aim of the March was protesting in favour of the 'remigration of criminals, salifists, and people that decline to assimilate into our society. Remigration has been a taboo for too long. We want to put remigration back on the political agenda.' The marches do dramatize certain perceptions of identity, revolving around the preservation of Flemish culture. In the case of the Remigration March, the claim is that mixing other cultures, primarily non-European, with Flemish cultures Flemish culture are not desirable. Both marches are an element of the claim-making repertoire, although the participants I spoke to find 'marching' rather outdated, and not politically influential enough. The marches are small, with a maximum of 200 people present. The social movement identity is primarily performed by means of clothing, but also by flags.

Figure 5. Nsvtv. (12 May 2019). Still from *NSV! trekt met ReMigratiemars door Leuven.*

Box 3. Internet memes

Internet memes play a significant part in the everyday claim-making repertoire of the young right. Memes can be defined as '(a) a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance, which (b) were created with awareness of each other, and (c). were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users' (Shifman 2014: 41). They will further not be analysed in this research, for the organizations studied in this research do not actively create and share memes themselves. However, as stated by one of my interviewees, several Flemish-nationalist meme pages are moderated by KVHV-members. One of my participants, Ewald (KVHV), for example, is the founder of the Facebook meme page *Make Vlaenderen Great Again,* which he created in February 2018. With over 13.000 likes he runs the largest Flemish-nationalist memepage in the country. The memes depict contemporary problems in Flanders in a funny and catchy way. 'If you can explain something with a funny picture, the youth will understand it more quickly. This way you can also provide them with information'.[74] While he started

---

[74] Interview Ewald, 23 May 2019, Oostende.

the page MVGA for fun, his page has political influence now, proven by the fact that he invented and initiated the March against Marrakesh. He found his inspiration in the meme culture of the alternative right in the United States, and like Schild & Vrienden, he recently started to sell merchandise:

> We sell stickers online, and caps with our pagename on it. Like Trump, but in Flanders. Stickers with different messages, our logo with our name. Funny right-wing symbols such as Pepe the frog. [...] If you try to make Flemish-nationalism popular, it is a good way to communicate your message. The stickers, the caps and what Schild & Vrienden does with t-shirts. That's how you make Flemish-nationalism famous in everyday life. If you see that in the streets, you will get more interest. That is the goal for Schild & Vrienden and for us, to make Flemish-nationalism popular among the youth.[75]

4.3 Everyday claim-making: apparel, stickers and memes

> *A while ago here in Leuven we were passing by a group of Moroccans, probably. A bit later, they came after us and one of them asked why I called him a dirty Moroccan, out of nowhere, while we had said nothing. After that one of them said, look out, they are from Schild & Vrienden, while we did not do anything. It really triggers people.[76]*

S&V member Harold's anecdote, here above, illustrates the performative character of apparel. By wearing Schild & Vrienden clothing on the streets, he represented and publicly enacted the identity of the social movement he belongs to. He has a number of stories of negative experiences after people recognized him as Schild & Vrienden member, and he is not the only one. The same goes for members of KVHV and NSV!. Many of my interviewees report negative experiences resulting from being recognized/identified by merchandise or

---

[75] Interview Ewald, 23 May 2019, Oostende.
[76] Interview Harold, 18 April 2019, Leuven.

traditional student outfits. 'There are bars in Overpoort [a bar street in Ghent] that allegedly give you a free meter of beer if you hand in one of our caps'.[77] This is one of the ways movements express their collective identities, and make social boundaries with other groups come to life. After all, all of my participants report having had negative experiences while representing their movements, often recognized by their clothing. Clothing helps to distinguish who is and who is not a part of the movement. In the case of Schild & Vrienden, everyone can buy the merchandise. This is different for the student associations. The previous chapter has already described that the rules of members are more strict at NSV! and KVHV, then they are at Schild & Vrienden.

Besides the social movement identity they represent, the clothing also symbolizes Flemish identity. NSV! and KVHV wear traditional Flemish student outfits, in contrast to all other student associations in Flanders. They strongly distinguish themselves from the other associations, focusing on keeping traditional Flemish student culture alive, implicitly emphasizing the historicity of Flemish student culture. Schild & Vrienden clothing and other merchandise is also used to perform Flemishness.

In their webshop, S&V sell T-shirts, sweaters, socks, water bottles and many different types of stickers. The socks with the Flemish Lion print are the most popular in demand. These are sold for the symbolical amount of €13,02 (Schild & Vrienden Shop), obviously referring to the year 1302. On the 11th of July 1302 the County of Flanders defeated the Kingdom of France (reign of Philip IV) in the notorious Battle of the Golden Spurs. The same year is depicted on their best selling T-shirts.

Vlaamse Sokken Geel

€13,02

Opties selecteren

S&V T-shirt

€24,90

Opties selecteren

Figure 6. Screenshot from the Schild & Vrienden webshop depicting Lion-socks and T-shirts.

---

[77] Interview Michael, 29 May 2019, Ghent.

This subtle historical reference is illustrating for the way the movement makes fine tuned claims, just like the washing label in the clothing, which reads: 'The clothing of S&V is made in Flanders for proud Flemings. Wear them with pride and always be the best version of yourself.' (Schild & Vrienden Instagram 2018b). While the castle protest was not subtle, the biggest part of the movements activism consists of smaller, day-to-day actions that represent the movement, Flemish identity, and often create an us-them dichotomy. In this process of displaying meaning, Facebook and Instagram are important tools for Schild & Vrienden..[78]

Figures 7, 8, 9. Schild & Vrienden Instagram. Stills from different video's of Schild & Vrienden supporter removing Antifa sticker and applying Schild & Vrienden stickers.

On its Instagram, predominantly member-created content is shared with the seventeen thousand followers. The content that is uploaded mostly consists of pictures of people wearing Schild & Vrienden merchandise, or posing somewhere with the Flemish flag, or people working out in Schild & Vrienden wear. A dominant part of the Schild & Vrienden repertoire is putting up stickers in the public space, often covering stickers containing a leftist message.

These acts of contention have a low threshold, but have a large reach. Anyone can participate, whether one is a member or not. On the Instagram page of the movement multiple user-created videos of different individuals applying stickers are shared on a daily basis with

[78] For further knowledge of the digital strategies of Schild en Vrienden I recommend reading Ico Maly's (2019) work in which he defines the Schild & Vrienden and affiliated international organizations as 'algorithm activists', expounding their strategic use of new media.

over seventeen thousand followers. The stickers that are sold contain different messages, like 'Make Vlaanderen Great Again' , 'Linkse ratten, rolt uw matten', 'Schild en Vriend', 'Ons land = onze waarden' and 'Stop islamisering' (Schild & Vrienden Winkel 2019). These stickers thus both represent the movement's identity, but they also make other claims relating to identity. Three types can be distinguished. For example, Make Vlaanderen Great Again and Pepe the Frog stickers depict an alt-right affiliated identity. Then there is the genre of stickers targeting specific groups, such as the 'Better dead than red', 'Communism is murder', Fuck Mrx', 'Fake NWS', 'Stop Islamization', 'No leftist rats in our city', 'Secure borders, secure future'. And finally, the genre of memes promoting Flemish identity, which involves Flemish lions and 'They shall not tame him [the lion]', referring to the first line of the national anthem. So the Flemish identity is primarily defined opposed to Islam, immigrants, and leftists, communists or cultural marxists.

Conclusion

The presence of non-party political far-right wing youth organizations in Europe has grown over the last decade. At the same time, in-depth research on this trend in the far-right is falling behind, as is ethnographic research on far-right wing social movements in general. It is this gap in the academic literature which this research has attempted to fill, by providing a ethnographic account of what I have called the new-flamingant radical right. This conclusion will provide an answer to the main question of this research, which was formulated as:

> *How are different meanings and perceptions of Flemish identity performed and reinforced in the contentious repertoire of the new-flamingant radical right?*

In order to formulate the answer, the research has broken up this question into four components, which will be revisited first. This brings me to the answer of the first sub-question: what organizations constitute the new radical right? The most important organizations in this regard are the student associations NSV and KVHV, and the socio-political youth movement Schild & Vrienden. They primary commonality of the movements is the Flemish-nationalist ideology in a modern form, namely increasingly based on the *Nouvelle Droite* ideology. This is expressed by their focus and emphasis on the metapolitical, opposed to the party-political, which is generally deemed unimportant. The movements and participants studied in this research can be considered part of this wider European trend. A second element characterizing them, is that the members of the movement are young: generally between 15 and 25. If one would make a typology based on ideologies of the different movements, Schild & Vrienden would be primarily Flemish-nationalist, with an unclear and wide interpretation of this concept. It seems to primarily revolve around the creation of a resilient youth, in order to preserve the Flemish culture and identity. NSV could be typlogized as ethno-nationalist, with the believe that every nation has the right to its own territory. KVHV members presents itself as primarily involved in the promotion of Flemishness and the preservation of a Catholic and conservative culture. Obviously, lot of overlap and differences are present among the perceptions of individuals, which brings us to

the second question. It was observed, that the most common conception of Flemish identity is an ethnic one, that it is forged throughout history. Underneath this Flemish identity hides a wide range of perceptions and beliefs. I have identified three main counter-identity groups that were used by the participants to define Flemishness. progressivists, non-Western immigrants and Wallonians. Some members see the Flemish and Wallonians as ethnically alike, other define clear differences. The Wallonians are by seen as a threat, presumably because they only interfere and are only visible in Flemish society to a limited extent. The group of non-Western immigrants was identified is a large threat, primarily because it is ethnically very different from the Flemish identity group, which makes up a part of a larger historical European Catholic identity group. Whereas these boundaries primarily revolve around cultural and ethnic aspects, the boundaries defined with the third group have different nature. It can roughly be defined as progressivists, but the interpretation of this term differs widely among my participants. For many, it refers to generation that is in power now that is responsible for the self hate and the subsequent demolition of Western cultural norms and values. Some participants say this is intentional, others think it is naivety.

In the fourth chapter, the final two sub-questions were answered. Starting with the third, it has been observed that the claim-making repertoire of new radical right consists of several different form of protest. The three most significant ones have been distinguished and classified as spatial contestation, modern marches and rallies and everyday claim-making practices. The outline is a broad generalization of the different forms of protest the movements use. The diversity of the movements can also be seen in their repertoire they use and the protest acts they organize. KVHV, for example, was involved in the March against Marrakesh, but does not engage a lot in public activism besides that. Although indirectly Schild & Vrienden results from the organization, as do different Flemish-nationalist memepages. The claim-making performances of Schild & Vrienden are inspired by the alternative right in the United States and different European organizations across Europe. The social movements' collective identities are reflected in their repertoire. For NSV! and Schild & Vrienden it is obvious that besides respectively a student association and a socio-political youth movement, they are protest movements engaging in politics of contention. They make public claims, appear in physical protests and on social media and they contest the status quo of society. For KVHV, this is less of a priority. To answer the fourth sub-question: what cultural materials are used to express and reinforce Flemish identity during public

performances? This was answered by identifying the different cultural materials that help to reinforce Flemish identity and symbolic boundaries with the outgroups that were defined in chapter 3. These range from narratives linking the historical Fleming to the contemporary one, speeches in which us-them dichotomies are emphasized that are publicly displayed, historical references to Flemish traditions and battles, physical objects such as stickers, clothing and the physical locations performers make use of, such as the streets of Brussels between European institutions and Gravensteen castle representing both Flemish cultural heritage as the European border. Taken together, the answers to these questions provide an answer to the main question: The different meanings and perceptions of Flemish identity that are present among the new-flamingant far right are expressed in their repertoire in many ways. The ethnic Flemish identity is threatened by different groups, among which the most significant are progressivists and non-Western immigrants. This Flemish identity is perceived to have been established centuries ago, and it is argued that is needs to be protected. During the claim-making performances of the movements, this perception of Flemishness is expressed in many different ways, both on- and offline. During traditional forms of protest, such as marches, Flemish identity is expressed in speeches in which speakers refer to the common descent of the people present, but also array of flags and chants were used to make the Flemish identity visible. An important part of the expression of Flemish identity, was emphasizing what Flemish identity is not. Most significantly, the outgroup of non-Western immigrants was used to reinforce a feeling of collectivity among the participants of protest, while at the same time progressivists were blamed for reeling them in. Flemish identity is also expressed in more modern types of claim-making, for example by means of the internet, on which predominantly Schild & Vrienden uses objects in the physical world to make claims on the internet, ranging from everyday objects as clothing and stickers to a large castle as a representation for Flemish identity.

In sum, fusing performance theory with social and collective identity literature has enabled this research to reach multiple goals: first, it has provided an ethnographic account of the different sentiments, beliefs, ideologies and perceptions of Flemish identity among. It thus has explored the individuals beliefs and perceptions, which are understudied in research on the far-right. Second, It has shown the wide array of interpretations that are connected to this notion of Flemish identity. The different layers of identity, involving the individual, social movement, Flemish, and Flemish all have been covered, and we can conclude that

there is a large amount of overlap within these identities. After this, integrating performance theory in the research helped to give a detailed analysis of the contentious repertoire of the movements. It has helped to show that there is overlap in the ways the movements make claims, but that a lot of differences can be identified as well. At the same time, performance theory was used to show how the Flemish identity was expressed in the repertoire. While this research primarily focused on different perceptions of individuals and the messages that were sent across during the repertoire, and potential links between the two, it has not as much researched how messages communicated by performers actually are interpreted by audiencies. Social movement scholars have earlier pointed to this research gap. The framework I have presented may serve as a first step to link individual perceptions to public performances. Additionally, I'd like to emphasize the significance of social media as a means of communication among members of the young far-right. It would be of great value if helpful to gain more insight in the process and dynamics of the online behaviour of individual members of far-right wing supporters.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Research participants

Name (anonymized) and age	Organization	Date and location of interview	Length in hours
Nick (15)	Schild & Vrienden	30 April 2019, Cafe Hollywood, Boom.	1.07.28
Harold (22)	Schild & Vrienden	18 April 2019, Cafe at train station, Leuven.	00.55.16
Dries (26)	Schild & Vrienden, formerly KVHV	4 April 2019, Flemish Interest office, Brussels.	00.35.42
Richard (22)	KVHV-Ghent, formerly Schild & Vrienden	20 May 2019, Cafe De Kroon, Ghent.	1.42.02
Ewald (21)	Former candidate member KVHV-Ghent, Creator of MVGA meme page.	23 May, Coffee bar, Oostende.	1.27.45
Daniel (23)	KVHV-Antwerp,	24 May 2019, Coffeelabs, Antwerp.	1.25.57
Michael (28)	KVHV-Gent	29 May 2019, Cafe	2.24.02

		Marimain, Ghent.	
Koen (24)	NSV!-Ghent	1 May 2019, Cafe The Barn, Ghent.	2.37.49
Willem (23)	NSV!-Ghent	7 May 2019, Cafe Patrick Foley's, Ghent.	2.46.41
Cornel (23)	NSV!-Ghent	2 May 2019, Cafe De Kroon, Ghent.	1.15.48
Gaston (21)	NSV!-Leuven & Schild & Vrienden	22 May at cafe at train station, Leuven.	1.05.52
Youri (18)	NSV!-Ghent	10 May 2019 at cafe in city center, Ghent.	1.16.58

Bibliography

Primary sources

Audiovisual material

Hans Verreyt (2018, 16 December). *Toespraken Mars tegen Marrakesh.* Retrieved from
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=017ObgwQPpE.

Lauren Southern. (2017, 25 July). *#DefendEurope Mission Begins!*. Retrieved from:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gQ9jMwgoTZA

Lauren Southern. (2018, 25 April). *Migrants VS European Youth in French Alps*. Retrieved
from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LpEd1sowdQ

NSV!tv (2018, 25 March). *NSV!! Stille Mars - Stop de genocide op blanke boeren.* Retrieved
from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_w5kSJuz2Ng.

RT. (2018, 16 December). *Protesters rally in Brussels against UN migration pact adoption.*
Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lxg8hNiTxMo.

Ruptly (2018, 16 December) *LIVE: Protest against migration pact adoption takes place in
Brussels.* Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yi3oVFeuT4o.

Schild & Vrienden. (2018a, 7 March). *Schild & Vrienden defends Gravensteen from
open-border activists.* Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXSOC7qwZso.

Schild & Vrienden. (2019b, 2 Januari). *Speech Dries Van Langenhove Mars tegen
Marrakesh.* Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eqw9-IVDn3s.

VRT NWS. (2018, 7 September). *Wie is Schild & Vrienden echt?* Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvffMoYRDuQ&vl=nl

Yvette A.. (2018, 17 December). *Mars tegen Marrakesh 16 12 2018*. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fB0NAKkKCNk.

Visual material 1. Figures

Cover image: '*Vlaamse vlag*'. Retrieved from the Flemish Parliament under the Free Open Data License Flanders v.1.2 https://www.vlaamsparlement.be/dossiers/vlaamse-symbolen

Figure 1. Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia. (28 July 2013). *Flemish community in Belgium and Europe*

Figure 2 . Schild & Vrienden. (8 March 2019). Still from *Schild & Vrienden defends Gravensteen from open-border activists.* Retrieved from:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXSOC7qwZso

Figure 3. Still from (Hans Verreyt). (2018, 16 December). *Toespraken Mars tegen Marrakesh*.

Figure 4. Still from NSV! Stille Mars - Stop de genocide op blanke boeren
Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_w5kSJuz2Ng

Figure 5. Nsvtv. (12 May 2019). Still from *NSV! trekt met ReMigratiemars door Leuven.* Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b_4hZ76uSq4.

Figure 6. Screenshot from the Schild en Vrienden webshop depicting socks and T-shirts. Retrieved from: https://schildenvrienden.com/shop/?orderby=popularity.

Figures 7, 8, 9. Schild & Vrienden Instagram. Stills from different video's of Schild & Vrienden supporter removing Antifa sticker and applying Schild & Vrienden stickers. Retrieved from: https://www.instagram.com/schildenvrienden/?hl=nl

Visual material 2. Other

Schild & Vrienden [schildenvrienden]. (2019, 27 April). *Spread the word*. [Instagram video] Retrieved from
https://www.instagram.com/p/Bww0W8iA9e-/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link.

Schild & Vrienden [schildenvrienden]. (2018, 26 December) *We have principles..* [Instagram photo] Retrieved from https://www.instagram.com/p/Br3GkJkl8R2/

Vlaams Parlement (2019) '*Vlaamse vlag'*. Retrieved from the Flemish Parliament under the Free Open Data License Flanders v.1.2
https://www.vlaamsparlement.be/dossiers/vlaamse-symbolen

Websites

KVHV (2019) *Nationale webstek van het Katholiek Vlaams Hoogstudentenverbond*
https://kvhv.org/

NSV (2019). *Onze missie.* Retrieved from https://nsv.be/

Schild & Vrienden (2019). *Winkel*. Retrieved from: https://schildenvrienden.com/shop/

Secondary sources

Alexander, Jeffrey C., Bernhard Giesen, and Jason L. Mast. 2006. *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual.*

Art, D. (2008). The organizational origins of the contemporary radical right: The case of Belgium. Comparative Politics, 40(4), 421-440.

Arzheimer, K., & Carter, E. (2006). Political opportunity structures and right‑wing extremist party success. *European Journal of Political Research*, *45*(3), 419-443.

Baudet, T. (2013). *Oikofobie*. Prometheus.

Benford, R. D., & Hunt, S. A. (1992). Dramaturgy and social movements: The social construction and communication of power. *Sociological inquiry*, *62*(1), 36-55.

Berezin, M. (2007). Revisiting the French National Front: The ontology of a political mood. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *36*(2), 129-146.

Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1991). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge* (No. 10). Penguin Uk.

Berlet, C., Christensen, K., Duerr, G., Duval, R. D., Garcia, J. D., Klier, F. & Mihailovic, A. (2015). *Digital media strategies of the far right in Europe and the United States*. Lexington Books.

Betz, H. G. (1994). *Radical right-wing populism in Western Europe*. Springer.

Blee, K. M. (2007). Ethnographies of the far right. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *36*(2), 119-128.

Caiani, M., Della Porta, D., & Wagemann, C. (2012). *Mobilizing on the extreme right: Germany, Italy, and the United States*. Oxford University Press.

De Benoist, A., & Champetier, C. (2000). Manifesto of the French New Right in year 2000. *New European Conservative.*

De Witte, H. (2006). Extreem-rechts militantisme in Vlaanderen: uiting van racisme of nationalisme?. *Res Publica*, *4*, 421.

Della Porta, D., Diani, M., & Tarrow, S. (2015). Contentious Politics. In The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements. : Oxford University Press.

Della Porta, D. (Ed.). (2014). *Methodological practices in social movement research*. OUP Oxford.

Diani, M. (2013). Networks and social movements. *The Wiley‑Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements.*

Eyerman, R. (2006). Performing opposition or, how social movements move. *Social performance: Symbolic action, cultural pragmatics, and ritual*, 193-217.

Erk, J. (2005). From Vlaams Blok to Flemish Interest: the Belgian far-right renames itself. West European Politics, 28(3), 493-502.

Fekete, E. (2018). *Europe's Fault Lines: Racism and the Rise of the Right*. Verso Books.

Fominaya, C. F. (2010). Collective identity in social movements: Central concepts and debates. *Sociology Compass*, *4*(6), 393-404.

Fuist, T. N. (2014). The dramatization of beliefs, values, and allegiances: Ideological performances among social movement groups and religious organizations. *Social Movement Studies*, *13*(4), 427-442.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life.* Garden City, N.Y. Doubleday.

Golder, M. (2016). Far right parties in Europe. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *19*, 477-497.

Hermans, T. (Ed.). (2015). *The Flemish movement: a documentary history 1780-1990*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Kimmel, M. (2007). Racism as adolescent male rite of passage: Ex-Nazis in Scandinavia. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *36*(2), 202-218.

Klandermans, B. & Mayer, N. (2005). *Extreme right activists in Europe: Through the magnifying glass*. Routledge.

Lamont, M., & Molnár, V. (2002). The study of boundaries in the social sciences. *Annual review of sociology*, *28*(1), 167-195.

Liang, C. (Ed.). (2008). Europe for the Europeans. London: Routledge.

Leitner, H., Sheppard, E., & Sziarto, K. M. (2008). The spatialities of contentious politics. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *33*(2), 157-172.

Linden, A., & Klandermans, B. (2007). Revolutionaries, wanderers, converts, and compliants: Life histories of extreme right activists. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *36*(2), 184-201.

Maly, I. (2019). New Right Metapolitics and the Algorithmic Activism of Schild & Vrienden. *Social Media+ Society*, *5*(2), 2056305119856700.

McCarthy, J. D., & Zald, M. N. (1977). Resource mobilization and social movements: A partial theory. *American journal of sociology*, *82*(6), 1212-1241.

Melucci, A. (1995). The process of collective identity. *Social movements and culture*, *4*, 41-63.

Mudde, C. (2000). *The ideology of the extreme right*. Oxford University Press.

Mudde, C. (2004). The populist zeitgeist. *Government and opposition*, *39*(4), 541-563.

Mudde, C. (2009). *Populist radical right parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge university press.

Polletta, F., & Jasper, J. M. (2001). Collective identity and social movements. *Annual review of Sociology*, *27*(1), 283-305.
.
Ragin, C. C., & Amoroso, L. M. (2011). *Constructing social research: The unity and diversity of method*. Pine Forge Press

Rydgren, J. (2007). The sociology of the radical right. *Annu. Rev. Sociol.*, *33*, 241-262.

Rydgren, J. (2008). Immigration sceptics, xenophobes or racists? Radical right‐wing voting in six West European countries. *European Journal of Political Research*, *47*(6), 737-765.

Shifman, L. (2014). *Memes in digital culture*. MIT press.

Snow, D. A. (2004). Framing processes, ideology, and discursive fields. *The Blackwell companion to social movements*, *1*, 380-412.

Snow, D. A., & Benford, R. D. (1988). Ideology, frame resonance, and participant mobilization. *International social movement research*, *1*(1), 197-21.

Snow, D. A., & Benford, R. D. (1992). Master frames and cycles of protest. *Frontiers in social movement theory*, *133*, 155.

Swyngedouw, M., & Ivaldi, G. (2001). The extreme right utopia in Belgium and France: The ideology of the Flemish Vlaams Blok and the French Front National. West European Politics, 24(3), 1-22

Tajfel, Henri (1981) *Human Groups and Social Categories,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tarrow, S., & Tilly, C. (2007). Contentious politics and social movements. In *The Oxford handbook of comparative politics.*

Tarrow, S. G. (2011). *Power in movement: Social movements and contentious politics.* Cambridge University Press.

Tarrow, S. (2013). Contentious politics. *The Wiley‑Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movement.*

Tilly, C. *(1977). From mobilization to revolution.*

Tilly, C. (1977) *Getting It Together in Burgundy, 1675–1975. Theory and Society 4* : 479–504.

Tilly, C. (2008). *Contentious performances*. Cambridge University Press.

Tilly*, C., & Tarrow, S. G. (2015). Contentious politics.* Oxford University Press.

Virchow, F. (2007). Performance, emotion, and ideology: On the creation of "collectives of emotion" and worldview in the contemporary German far right. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *36*(2), 147-164.

Wils, L. (2009). *Van de Belgische naar de Vlaamse natie: Een geschiedenis van de Vlaamse Beweging*. Acco.

Yildiz, A. A., & Verkuyten, M. (2011). Inclusive victimhood: Social identity and the politicization of collective trauma among Turkey's Alevis in Western Europe. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, *17*(3), 243-269.