Article

The Radical Right versus the Media: from Media Critique to Claims of (Mis)Representation

Louise Knops [1],* and Benjamin De Cleen [2]

[1] Department of Political Science, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, 1050 Brussels, Belgium; E-Mail: louise.knops@vub.be
[2] Department of Communication Studies, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, 1050 Brussels, Belgium;
E-Mail: benjamin.de.cleen@vub.be

* Corresponding author

Abstract

Criticizing mainstream media for their 'lies' or 'fake news' has become a common political practice on the radical right. Further empirical research is needed to better understand the intricacies of these attacks on media, in particular for the way they relate to criticism of the political system as a whole and to matters of political representation. How do radical right actors construct a sense of political misrepresentation through their critique of media, and how does this allow them to make representative claims? This is what we explore in this article through a discourse analysis of the Flemish radical right youth movement Schild & Vrienden. Drawing inspiration from constructivist theories of representation, we explore the entanglement in empirical practice between two dimensions of representation: 1) between its literal meaning (as 'portrayal') and its political meaning (as standing or speaking for), and 2) between representation and misrepresentation. With our analysis, we shed light on the increasing politicization of the media as a non-electoral space of representation and misrepresentation, and on the role played by media criticism in the radical right's broader (meta)political strategies.

1. Introduction

Whilst there is nothing new about the radical right criticizing the media, such attacks have certainly gained visibility, especially since Donald Trump's campaign for the US presidency in 2016. Criticism of mainstream media can be heard across the political spectrum, but is particularly prominent on the extremes (where explicitly ideologically inspired alternative media also play a stronger role). It is nowhere as visible and as structural as on the radical right. Jibes from 'fake news media' to 'lying press', and accusations that the 'politically correct' and 'left-wing' media are 'enemies of the people' in cahoots with political elites are common currency on the radical right, from the

US to Europe and well beyond. In Belgium, a Flemish radical right youth movement—*Schild & Vrienden* (*Shield and Friends*, S&V)—has recently made a noticeable entry in the political scene amongst others for its aggressive discourse on media and pretension to 'speak the truth' that the media are said to 'hide'.

Attacks on the 'lying press' are not merely denunciations of how media portray radical right leaders, movements, parties. They are also fundamental criticisms of how these media represent the world; of their portrayal of migration, Islam, the nation, but also of masculinity, femininity and the traditional family, to name just a few issues. Ultimately, these criticisms link up with the radical right's nativist claims to represent the nation, its con-

servative positioning as defenders of the social order and of traditional identities, and its populist claims to represent the 'ordinary people' or the 'silent majority'. Used by radical-right political parties as well as activists and movements, this media critique is part of a broader metapolitical and ideological struggle to question established truths and values and to undermine the credibility of mainstream media. As such, attacks on media have also become a key discursive tool that is mobilized by radical right actors to feed a much broader sense of resentment vis-à-vis the political as well as cultural establishment, ultimately reinforcing the feeling that 'we are not being represented'.

In the current context of a so-called 'crisis' of representation, further empirical research is therefore needed to better understand how media criticism enables radical right actors to construct a sense of political misrepresentation and profile themselves as representative actors. This is what we explore in this article through a discourse analysis of the Flemish radical right youth movement S&V. In particular, based on a discussion on the two meanings of (mis)representation—as (mis)portrayal and as political (mis)representation—we shed light on the increasing politicization of the media as a non-electoral space of representation and misrepresentation.

To theorize these connections, we first turn to constructivist theories of representation. With its focus on the performative dimension of representative claims, this literature provides us with the necessary conceptual tools to identify and analyze the different layers in the representative discourse of S&V. After this theoretical section, we turn to a brief thematic analysis to document the centrality of media in the discourse of S&V. We then conduct a detailed discourse analysis of the S&V discourse about media as found in text, audio and audio-visual content on the S&V public Facebook page. We conclude by providing a summary of our key findings and reflect on their broader implications for the study of the relation between the media, the radical right and democracy.

2. On Representation and Misrepresentation

2.1. The Meanings of (Political) Representation

As famously documented by Hanna Pitkin (1967), the word representation has multiple meanings; from its literal, etymological sense of 'making present again' (representation from the Latin word *repraesentare*) to its juridical-political meaning, referring here to the relationship between voters and their elected representatives.

As Michael Saward remarks, "from Rome to early modern times, there are overlapping notions of representation as symbolizing, resembling, portraying, standing for, acting for a collectivity, authorized and non-authorized portraying" (2010, p. 5). In his semantic analysis of the word, Yves Sintomer speaks of an "almost infinite multiplicity of uses" (2013, p. 14). Amongst the

historical uses of 'representation', lies the idea of 'portrayal'; a picture or a painting represents someone or something which is not literally present. In contemporary society, media feature as a prominent provider of 'representations' (as portrayals) of individuals and groups.

As far as *political* representation is concerned, the dominant understanding of the word in Western Europe has been associated, since the 17th century, with electoral institutions; what Sintomer calls 'mandate-representation' (2013). Pitkin (1967) defines political representation by opposing a substantive dimension ("acting in the interest of the represented in a manner responsive to them") to the more descriptive and symbolic dimensions of representation ("standing for the represented by virtue of resemblance or symbolization"). More recently, the meaning of political representation has significantly evolved under the so-called constructivist turn (Saward, 2010). Amongst others, scholars have sought to address the "widespread sense of remoteness of elected politicians" and "provoke fresh thinking about what representation in politics is, and what it can be" (Saward, 2010, pp. 1–2). Political representation moved from the dominant mandate conception to a broader, all-encompassing idea of "creating political presence" (Castiglione & Pollack, 2019) that stretches beyond the realm of elections. Here, one dimension that sets electoral and non-electoral representation apart is the way in which people's preferences or choices are thought to be represented. In electoral representation, it is believed that citizens' choices are mostly expressed through votes. In non-electoral representation "they [i.e., citizens' choices] are seen as operating in more informal settings through voice" (Saward, 2019, p. 279). This suggests that a variety of actors—well beyond parliament and party politics—can be seen as representatives, or 'makers' of representative claims: social movements, civil society actors, trade-unions, but also grassroots initiatives and citizens themselves.

This constructivist approach to representation redefines the contours of what counts as 'political representation' in other ways. It highlights that representation—whether electoral or not—originates in a representative claim: a claim "to represent or to know what represents the interests of something or somebody", presented to an audience (Saward, 2010, p. 38). As such, this perspective draws attention to the highly performative aspects of representative claims: "the claim-making activity participates in the construction of represented groups and the representations (in a symbolic sense) of these groups" (Dutoya & Hayat, 2016, p. 2), an argument also central to, for example, Ernesto Laclau's much older discourse-theoretical work on, amongst others, populism (Laclau, 1977).

Drawing on Saward's terminology (Saward, 2010, p. 36), this means that the maker of a representative claim (this 'maker' may or may not be the 'subject' that is claimed to be a representative) contributes to the construction of the 'object' (the constituency or group that

is claimed to be represented by the 'subject') and to the *idea of* that 'object' (the idea of 'the people' for example)—what Saward calls 'a referent'. An important role is played here as well by the 'audience' that may receive, accept or reject the claims in and outside electoral cycles; this audience consists of the members of the group that is claimed to be represented but also of other groups of citizens and other actors (political competitors, media, etc.) who can accept, reject or ignore these claims. In this context, Eline Severs has stressed the importance of remaining attentive to the substantive core and relational dimension of representation, arguing that we need to "discern mere claims to 'speak for' the represented from those instances in which the perspectives of the represented are actually taken up" (Severs, 2012, p. 172). This distinction, as Severs argues, is highly contextual. Claims can indeed be implicit and explicit depending on the extent to which audiences' terms of reference or familiar frameworks overlap with that of the claim-maker.

As pointed out by Guasti and Almeida (2018), these non-electoral forms of representation are likely to emerge most strongly in moments of rupture between citizens and their elected representatives. This is commonly referred to as a 'crisis of representation', revolving around the general feeling that 'we are not represented'. From a constructivist point of view, this (feeling of) crisis is, itself, also (co-)constructed through claims of (mis)representation.

2.2. The Meanings of (Political) Misrepresentation

In the same way that representation harbours multiple meanings, misrepresentation too points to different notions. In its most literal sense, misrepresentation means "the action or offence of giving a false or misleading account of the nature of something" (Lexico, n.d.). This literal meaning is often mobilized politically by marginalized and disadvantaged groups (Akachar, 2018; Bull, 2005), to denounce the misrepresentations (as misportrayals) produced by dominant groups in an attempt to maintain their hegemonic status. This literal meaning has also been mobilized by actors who seek to construct a sense of victimization around groups that would not typically be considered as victims. Consider here for example the figure of 'the white man' constructed as a victim of mass-immigration and anti-white racism; a situation which, according to the radical right, is being *misrepresented* (distorted) by the politically correct media, as our analysis will show.

Misrepresentation has another—more strictly political—meaning, captured by the idea of *claims of* *misrepresentation*. As explained by Guasti and Almeida (2018), claims of misrepresentation are raised by actors challenging the monopoly of power by elected representatives. Such claims do not only challenge *elected* representatives, as illustrated by the populist argument that a corrupt or failing 'establishment'—consisting of politicians, but also intellectuals, artists and media—does not represent ordinary people. Claims of political misrepresentation have received significantly less attention in the constructivist literature. They deserve further investigation, however, because of the close connection between claims of misrepresentation and the broader sense of 'crisis' of representation. Indeed, from a constructivist point of view, actors claiming that 'we are not represented' may also contribute to the very crisis they claim to be the response to (Moffitt, 2015). Or to put it differently, claims of misrepresentation are not only symptoms of a 'crisis', they also discursively co-construct the crisis in question.

If political representation consists of claims that 'create political presence' (Castiglione & Pollack, 2019), we could expect that political misrepresentation may be invoked through claims that denounce the 'political absence' of a particular actor or voice in a debate, or the distortion of its real voice. This strongly echoes Saward's definition of wider interests and new voices' representative claims, i.e. claims that are "based on the fact that an important perspective within a debate is not being heard or voiced" (Saward, 2010, p. 98). This formulation at once signals the simultaneous occurrence of claims of misrepresentation and representative claims. Indeed, a claim of misrepresentation (of a group being not heard/voiced or represented incorrectly) almost inevitably implies (at least implicitly) a claim of representation. The actor claiming that a group is 'misrepresented', simultaneously claims a) to know the misrepresented group, b) to speak in the name of that group.

To summarize our theoretical argument, let us try to visualize the dimensions of (mis)representation along the meanings developed so far (see Table 1).

In our analysis, we will refer to two meanings of representation: its literal meaning (representation as portrayal) and its more strictly political meaning (representation as standing for or speaking for, that originates in a representative claim and creates 'political presence'). The same goes for misrepresentation; we look at its literal meaning (misrepresentation as misportrayal, which can be found most prominently in media criticism) and its political meaning (political misrepresentation as *not* standing for, *not* speaking for, found in claims about 'political absence' or distortion). We seek to explore the connec-

Table 1. The two meanings of (mis)representation.

	Misrepresentation	Representation
(Mis)portrayal	[A]	[C]
(Not) standing for/speaking for	[B]	[D]

tions between these dimensions in an effort to better understand how a critique of misportrayals by the media [A] is connected to claims of political misrepresentation [B], and how these are connected to arguments about truthful portrayal [C] and representative claims in the stricter political sense [D].

3. Schild & Vrienden: Case Description

S&V describes itself as a 'metapolitical' movement; the term metapolitics refers here to the aim of achieving cultural-ideological hegemony, which surpasses the practices of party politics and is aimed at broader ideological shifts. The notion of 'metapolitics' has a long history dating back to German romantic nationalism (Viereck, 2003) and has been connected to the 'right-wing Gramscianism' of Alain de Benoist and the French Nouvelle Droite founded in the late 1960s. At the time, their aim was to use originally left-wing Gramscian theories of cultural hegemony in a right-wing attempt to change societal consensus (Bar-On, 2007; Maly, 2018c). In a similar move, under its own description as a 'metapolitical' movement', S&V strives to recover the 'Flemish youth's resilience' ; it refers to itself as the embodiment of a new 'counter-culture' that seeks to challenge the 'cultural marxism' inherited from May '68, of which the media are one of the flag bearers.

S&V is also a very particular mix of local and global elements. On the one hand, S&V draws on global developments which include the embracing of internet culture by younger generations of radical right activists (inspired by the US Alt.Right or the French *Génération Identitaire*). S&V's use of meme culture, references to Pepe the Frog, its slogan 'Make Vlaanderen Great Again' (in reference to Donald Trump's 2016 election slogan), the English subtitles of its videos all show its international embeddedness and attempts to reach a global radical right audience (Maly, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). At the same time, S&V is a local phenomenon that is rooted in the history of Flemish nationalism and is closely associated with the (radical) right-wing tendencies of the so-called Flemish Movement. The choice of '*Schild & Vrienden*'[1] as a name and several of its key slogans (e.g., *Linkse Ratten, Rol uw Matten*, translated by S&V itself as 'Leftists Rats, get the fuck out'), evidence how it draws on traditional tropes and references of the Flemish nationalist radical right. Whilst S&V members have been involved in the right-wing Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (New-Flemish Alliance, NVA) as well as in the radical right Vlaams Belang (VB), S&V leader Dries Van Langenhove's running in the 2019 federal elections for the radical right party VB seems to mark the encapsulation of the movement within the Flemish nationalist radical right (the VB

did well in the elections and Van Langenhove is currently a representative for the VB in the Belgian Parliament as well as one of its most radical voices). Finally, this global-local entanglement is also apparent in S&V's media critique: The movement draws on global radical right themes (fake news, the lying press, cultural marxism, the politically correct journalistic elite) and at the same time on well-rehearsed narratives more specific to the Flemish radical right.

To understand S&V's rise to prominence and its contentious relation with media, one episode in the recent history of the movement bears particular significance. On 5 September 2018, the Flemish television broadcaster (VRT) aired a reportage in the programme *Pano* to reveal the 'true face' of S&V, showing, for example, how S&V members shared racist, anti-Semitic and sexist memes in their private chat groups. There were strong reactions to the content revealed in the reportage, including a judicial investigation[2] and the temporary suspension of S&V spokesperson Dries Van Langenhove from Ghent University. At the same time, the reportage strongly increased the visibility of S&V. Indeed, S&V and others on the radical right turned the Pano reportage into the perfect opportunity for collective victimization; arguing here that the 'leftist' public broadcaster had provided a dishonest portrayal of S&V and, through this misportrayal, had betrayed the entire 'Flemish people'.

4. Corpus and Method of Analysis

There are two main steps in our analysis. First of all, to get an idea of the relative importance and texture of S&V discourse about media, we performed a quantitative thematic analysis of the Facebook posts of the movement. Secondly, we performed a detailed discourse analysis of the media-related content to lay bare the connections between (mis)portrayal and political (mis)representation.

4.1. The Centrality of Media in S&V Discourse: Descriptive Thematic Analysis

The corpus for our quantitative thematic analysis consists of the content of S&V public Facebook page between 5 October 2017 (the creation of the public Facebook page) and 28 January 2019 (date of data extraction with Netvizz). Our final Facebook data set consists of 313 posts[3]. For each post, we also collected the related comments and meta-data (number of likes, shares, comments and reactions). We did not analyze the comments; our analysis being centered on the claims by S&V as an actor, rather than the individual reactions of S&V followers.

---

[1] This name refers to the 'Matins of Bruges' battle of 1302, a central historical reference in Flemish nationalist mythology. The name Schild and Vrienden comes from a battle cry of that period that was also used as a shibboleth to distinguish speakers of Flemish dialect from French speakers.

[2] At the time of writing, this judicial investigation is ongoing. The leader of the movement has been charged with the violation of Belgian laws on racism and holocaust denial, amongst others.

[3] Given the recent restrictions imposed on Facebook's API and the limitations of the application Netvizz, the figures presented in this section should not be considered as exhaustive and may present a small margin of error.

Based on a thematic analysis, we then identified the posts that refer to media explicitly (i.e., posts that mention media in general or a particular medium, in the form of an explicit denunciation or on a more informational basis). This amounted to 165 posts (53 % of total Facebook content)[4]. This confirms the centrality of media (at least in terms of frequency) in the discourse of S&V and the relevance of focusing on this theme in particular. Holt and Haller (2017, 2018) in their work on the far-right movement PEGIDA, also found that a large proportion of their discourse (around 40%) was explicitly devoted to media.

The high presence of media-related content also needs to be considered in the context of our period of analysis—one during which a major media-event occurred: the production of the controversial Pano documentary by VRT (as explained in our case description). Although we do not engage with the reception of the posts (the likes, comments, etc.) in our analysis, it is useful to briefly discuss the levels of engagement of the media-related posts as they evidence the popular and contentious character of the S&V critique of media on Facebook. The level of engagement of each post is calculated by adding the number of likes, comments, shares and reactions. The average level of engagement in the total Facebook corpus (the 313 posts) is 1228. When looking at the content that generated engagement rates above the average, we found a predominance of media content. For example, in the twenty posts that generated the highest engagement rates (from 2763 to 22631), twelve posts displayed explicit and elaborate attacks on media.

Within this corpus of 165 posts about media, we then identified the main themes. The overview below shows the posts' *central* themes; the posts having been coded in one theme-category only:

1) S&V representations in mainstream and alternative media (without any accusation of misportrayal) (53 posts);
2) S&V criticizes the media for 'misportrayals':

    2.1) social and political issues are misportrayed by the media (30 posts),
    2.2) S&V is misportrayed by the media (accusations of unfair 'framing' of the movement and its spokesperson) (24 posts).

3) S&V criticizes censorship by the media (content pulled off from the web, accounts blocked on social media) (25 posts);
4) S&V sets-up its own independent media channel (12 posts);
5) Other criticisms of media (e.g., of the functioning of media institutions, controversies around particular journalists or news-outlets) (9 posts);

6) Other media material (e.g., posts about the growing count of followers on Facebook, Instagram) (12 posts).

This schematic overview provides a number of important indications. For one, our overview shows S&V's ambiguous relation to traditional 'mainstream' media (see Holt & Haller, 2017, 2018, about PEGIDA). On the one hand, criticism of mainstream media is an oft-recurring topic in S&V discourse (categories 2, 3 and 5; 88 posts in total). On the other hand, S&V highlights its own media performances, proudly showing how well-known mainstream media report on the movement (category 1; 53 posts). Similarly, social media are central to the movement's communication and operation, and it often refers to numbers of online followers to strengthen its representative claims. But it also frequently denounces instances of 'censorship' by social media. The latter, as we will see in more detail later, has been used by S&V to construct a sense of injustice and victimhood. Most importantly, for our purpose, this thematic analysis reveals that S&V does indeed produce much discourse on misrepresentations (misportrayals) by media—either of the movement itself or of the issues it focuses on, especially migration.

4.2. Unpacking the Media Critique: Discourse Analysis

In our discourse analysis we aim to lay bare the structure of S&V's media criticism. We focus on its criticism of media's misportrayal of political actors and societal realities, its claim to represent reality truthfully, and the links between these arguments and political claims of representation and misrepresentation.

We conduct an in-depth analysis of the 165 media-related Facebook posts. Since no single post in the dataset is 'text-only' (all posts are text and link and/or photo and/or video and/or meme), the dataset amounts to around 330 items consisting of written and spoken texts (the text of the posts but also speeches and interviews in mainstream and radical right media), videos (that can also be found on the movement's YouTube channel), photos and visuals, memes.

Drawing on a post-structuralist discourse-theoretical approach (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001), our analysis is macro-*textual* in that we consider that discourse analysis can be based on (any combination) of written and spoken words, images, sounds, gestures, events, and so on. Our analysis is also macro-*contextual* in that we believe that we can only understand S&V discourse by taking into account a broad context—with the Flemish and global radical right, its history and current developments as most relevant contexts (Carpentier & De Cleen, 2007). Our analysis follows the coding procedures and qualitative-interpretive prin-

[4] The non-media related content of our Facebook corpus (148 posts) relate to S&V activism (displaying the range of activities organized by the movement, from political contestation actions to charity actions, e.g., blood donations), information about Flemish cultural heritage and traditions, reactions to political events and controversies (in particular in the field of migration), jokes and memes with party political and/or ideological content, denunciations of all kinds, calls for donations to contribute to S&V through the purchase of promotional material (T-shirts, stickers). A large amount of posts also concerned the election of the S&V leader as student representative of Ghent University

ciples of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2003). We combine theoretical inspiration with analytical openness by integrating the notions of (mis)representation-as-(mis)portrayal, representative claims and claims of misrepresentation as sensitizing concepts. Rather than imposing a conceptual framework on the material, these sensitizing concepts point the qualitative researcher to relevant parts of the material (Bowen, 2006; Charmaz, 2003) in the process of gradually moving from descriptive open coding that stays close to the texts, to axial coding that identifies patterns in the texts under study, towards ever more interpretive, selective and theoretically inspired coding that allows us to address our research question in its complexity.

Given our aim to explore S&V's discourse on media through the lens of representative claims and claims of political misrepresentation, we pay attention to instances where such claims emerge in explicit forms (typically in written or spoken texts) but also to more implicit forms. To identify instances of claim-making, we pay attention to all aspects of S&V discourse (in whatever modality) to capture more subtle and implicit claim constructions. Concretely, we look at *arguments*, but also *vocabulary*—the way S&V "word[s] or lexicalize[s] the world in particular ways" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 129). We pay particular attention here to S&V's referential strategies (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, pp. 45–56), asking how it refers to and visually represents particular people and groups of people—especially media, politicians, the groups it claims to represent, and also itself. We study how S&V presents these groups and their relations between them, linguistically, visually and audio-visually.

5. The Representative Turns in the Discourse of S&V on Media

Our analysis is organized as follows (Table 2). First, we discuss the different accusations of misrepresentation-

as-misportrayal formulated by S&V (focusing on *what* is claimed to be misrepresented by the media) and *how* it voices those criticisms [A]. We then document why these denunciations are fundamentally political in the stricter sense [B], unveiling the different antagonisms at play and *who* is claimed to be misrepresented politically and *by whom*. Finally, we show how [A] and [B] are also intimately connected to S&V's' claims to speak the truth—presented as an act of political representation in itself—and to the movement's own representative claims in the strict sense [C–D]. To be clear, we follow this order for reasons of argumentative clarity. We are not implying that these are separate steps in S&V discourse. Quite the contrary, we will show how claims of representation and misrepresentation occur at the same time, as well as how (mis)portrayal and political representation are intimately connected.

5.1. Misrepresenting the Truth

The central accusation found in the data is the idea of 'truth misrepresentation' or 'truth obfuscation' by the media. The movement continuously argues that 'politically correct' media are indeed hiding crucial elements of the truth (S&V, 2018a). Firmly located within the discursive field of the radical right, S&V refers to the 'lying press' (*leugenpers*), a designation inspired by the German notion of *Lügenpresse* associated with the German radical right movement PEGIDA and originating in Nazi propaganda (Holt & Haller, 2017). Similarly, S&V builds on the (radical) right's tradition of anti-political correctness rhetoric to attack the media for giving a politically correct (as opposed to factually correct) image of the world, for example by using politically correct words that produce a skewed representation of reality. For example, as shown in Figure 1, S&V caricatured a "dictionary of mainstream media" arguing that "the mainstream media has already scrapped and replaced

Table 2. From (mis)portrayal to (mis)representation: The structure of S&V discourse.

	Misrepresentation	Representation
(Mis)portrayal of *what, and by whom*	[A] The lying, politically correct press accused of hiding the truth, of manipulation	[C]; S&V constructed as speaking and revealing the truth (in particular on migration)
	Accusations of censorship, thought police	S&V and the radical right constructed as defenders of conservative values, freedom of speech, democracy; political *in*correctness as an act of truth-speaking
	Accusations of ideological bias directed to the media and the political establishment constructed as a left-wing, pro-migration and negative force	
(Not) standing for/speaking for *whom*	[B] Claims about political misrepresentation of:	[D] Claims about political Representation of:
	Taxpayer (esp. versus state broadcaster)	Taxpayer
	Autochthonous Flemings (versus migrants)	The Flemish youth, the Flemish people
	Right-wing underdog/majority (versus leftist elite)	The Silent majority
		The Right

a whole range of words, now the word 'white' is being targeted, we recommend this dictionary for anyone reading mainstream media articles!*" (S&V, 2018c, authors' translation).

The media are not only accused of distorting the truth, but also of censoring those who do speak the truth. These arguments emerge in denunciations of mainstream media, social media companies and crowdfunding platforms, who are accused of blocking the accounts and deleting content produced by S&V or other radical right organizations (as shown in Figure 2, S&V, 2018d).

In some cases, the mass media and social media platforms are presented as part of the same powerful group

Figure 1. The politically correct dictionary of mainstream media, according to S&V.

Figure 2. A satiric cartoon over the alleged censorship by social media companies against S&V.

that aims to keep people from seeing the truth: "We brought you the information that the mass-media are hiding; that's why Facebook blocked Dries' [Van Langenhove, S&V leader] personal account" (S&V, 2018k, authors' translation). S&V regularly denounces the media for their participation in "oppression" and "censorship" and for being a "thought-police", a terminology with a long history drawing on the anti-communist tradition of (Flemish and other) radical right movements.

Given the centrality of migration and (Flemish, European, Western) identity in S&V's political agenda, these accusations of 'truth misrepresentation' also focus on how media portray migration. The viewpoints taken by the media are not treated by S&V as competing perspectives but are de-legitimized fundamentally as 'lies' or 'distortions'. For example, by 'fact-checking' numbers mentioned by the public broadcaster, S&V argues that "the VRT NWS lying press is going full speed ahead; through malevolent figures, the VRT wants to make you believe that there are just as many women as men in the migration flows flooding to Europe" (S&V, 2018f, authors' translation). Elsewhere, S&V describes the use of these malevolent figures and images as "emotional manipulation", as shown in Figure 3 (S&V,2018n, authors' translation).

Finally, S&V also accuses the media for (mis)representing the movement itself, attacking them for "framing'' S&V as a "bunch of racists" (S&V, 2018l, authors' translation). This is particularly striking in the corpus that covers the period after the VRT Pano reportage (from 05.09.2018 onwards). In a 10-minute video labelled 'Trial by the Media', S&V denounces and deconstructs what it describes as misrepresentations, the "frames", in which the VRT has portrayed S&V, later described as "attempts

Figure 3. The emotional manipulation by the media over migration, through the eyes of S&V.

by the leftist media to demonize [S&V leader] Dries Van Langenhove" (S&V, 2018o, authors' translation).

These repeated denunciations of how the media portray reality and S&V create the overall sense that the media's representation of reality is fundamentally untrustworthy and indeed morally suspect. This, as we will show, links up closely with the more political meaning of misrepresentation. Indeed, the vehement way in which S&V denounces the untruths—through constant accusations of lying, emotional manipulation, framing, demonizing, censoring—gives the impression that 'scandals' have been committed. As pointed out by Rosanvallon (2008, pp. 42–43), to denounce a scandal is to make public what has been hidden; it conveys a kind of ultra-reality to facts, it involves a stigmatization of the authorities and can be used as a means to give a "civic lesson". Hence, by uncovering the wrongdoings of the media, S&V attempts to boast its own credibility as political challenger; one who denounces the 'malfunctioning of the political system as a whole' (Guasti & Almeida, 2018, p. 13). The movement thus constructs a moral juxtaposition between S&V as a morally righteous force, and mainstream media and politics as morally suspect.

5.2. Misrepresenting You, the Taxpayer

One very explicit connection S&V makes between misportrayal by the media and political misrepresentation focuses on the public broadcaster VRT. The VRT was explicitly targeted 24 times by S&V in our Facebook corpus; it was also the source of inspiration for some of S&V's longest and most widely shared video clips (e.g., the video 'Trial by the Media'). Drawing on a long-established argument used by the radical right Vlaams Belang, S&V denounces the misuse of public money by the VRT, in particular in the context of the Pano reportage. Here, S&V explicitly interpellates people as taxpayers whose money is being used to misportray reality, to "frame" S&V, and ultimately, for "manipulating you…with your own taxpayer money" (S&V, 2018l, authors' translation).

Whilst the *Pano* reportage about S&V provided a favourable context for this connection to emerge (as explained in our case description above), there are other instances in the data where the figure of the 'betrayed taxpayer' appears. For example, when S&V accuses the VRT of 'censorship' and 'propaganda' after it reported an S&V video on 'Immigrants' riots in France' to Facebook (for copyright infringement), resulting in the deletion of the video in question:

> The taxpayer is clearly not allowed to question the propaganda of the state. The VRT is angry because a million citizens could see how we are being lied to with our own money….Share this message to fight

against censorship by the state broadcaster. (S&V, 2018h, authors' translation)

The term 'state broadcaster'(*staatsomroep*) is used here and elsewhere to stress the public broadcaster's connections to the state and the 'regime'. This critique of the VRT also extends to how the broadcaster is supposedly dominated by a broader leftist establishment. This becomes clear in the following excerpt in which S&V denounces the hiring of a new online communication officer at the VRT:

> The word is out! The news at the VRT will now be framed by Jihad Van Puymbroeck. We know Jihad for her statements about the 'Flemish culture that does not exist', but this young lady was also active previously with Kif Kif Movement, this subsidy-junkie organization which constantly bashes Theo Francken[5]…and wants to get rid of Zwarte Piet[6]. After working for the Green party…Jihad is now ready to tell us what we ought to think, with our own taxpayers' money! (S&V, 2018b, authors' translation)

The construction of an antagonism between on the one hand the 'leftist' media that misportray migration, 'Flemish culture' and S&V, and on the other hand the betrayed (Flemish) taxpayer as a misrepresented group is part and parcel of a broader strategy where the media is positioned as a political opponent in its own right; one whose legitimacy can be contested, and against which counter-claims can be formulated.

5.3. A Matter of (Political) Absence

Going back to the idea of political representation as the creation of 'political presence', in this section we show how S&V actively creates a sense of 'political absence', i.e., that a voice is *not being heard* in the political debate, but also being *silenced* actively. The most literal examples of how S&V constructs this 'political absence' are found in denunciations of censorship. S&V regularly reports social media pulling S&V content off their platforms and blocking S&V accounts, and it also refers to other radical right-wing media and actors being 'censored'. The broader political implications of this censorship are clearly illustrated in the example below where S&V—again drawing on long-established radical right tropes—moves from censorship by 'tech giants' to the idea 'of voices not allowed on board' and ultimately to 'a threat for *our* democracy and freedom of speech':

> The Infowars channels and accounts were simultaneously deleted yesterday by Spotify, YouTube, Google, Apple and Facebook. It is clear that the tech-giants

---

[5] Then State Secretary for Asylum and Migration for the right-wing Flemish nationalist Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie.
[6] In the Netherlands and Belgium especially, Saint Nicolas (Sinterklaas) is celebrated on the 6th of December with gifts to children. The controversial figure of 'Black Pete' is the 'helper' of the white Saint Nicolas (Sinterklaas); there is a controversy revolving around the Black Pete being impersonated in blackface and his looks that are considered a racist reference to colonial times.

don't want to allow certain voices on board, in particular during the US mid-term elections. Regardless of what you think of Infowars, it is clear that censorship represents a threat for our democracy and freedom of speech; register for our newsletter and join the fight against censorship. (S&V, 2018i, authors' translation)

Beyond social media, S&V also constructs media (in general) as the culprit for the silencing of particular voices. This is connected to the recurring theme of a left-wing hegemony over media and culture. In an interview with the alt-right channel *Red-Ice*, the S&V leader discusses the dominance of the left in the sphere of media and culture:

It has been very easy to be left-wing for the past decades; all the big media personalities, all the singers were left-wing and if they were right-wing, they would simply not talk about politics in fear of being smeared and slandered by the media. (S&V, 2018j, authors' translation)

Drawing on a well-rehearsed argument used by the Flemish and global radical right, S&V constructs the image of a media and cultural sphere that is so strongly dominated by the left that right-wing media personalities and artists would not even dare to speak out politically for fear of 'being smeared and slandered' (see De Cleen, 2016). The broader argument here—and this is crucial from the perspective of representation in its political sense—is that media and culture are sectors that are disproportionately left-wing compared to the rest of society. This, the right-wing populist argument goes, gives the left-wing elite a political *megaphone* that is in no way warranted by political support for the left among ordinary people. And it allegedly gives the left the opportunity to *silence* right-wing voices in the political debate. In this manner, media, S&V argues, who should be "the fourth estate…those who control our politicians…the watchdog of democracy" have become "the lapdogs of the establishment and the hunting dogs of cultural marxism" (S&V, 2019a, authors' translation).

The left-wing bias of the media, according to S&V, is also apparent in the media's coverage of migration and, more broadly, of events involving people with an immigration background. Media are accused of silencing the 'truth' about migration but also for "ignoring for decades the growing problem of criminal migrants in our cities, who have been stealing from fellow citizens, attacking help-services and hosting terrorists" (S&V, 2018e, authors' translation). Through a long list of denunciations of media ignoring or hiding problems with migrants, S&V turns misportrayal by the media into a broader political problem voiced in highly moral terms; migration is constructed by S&V as detrimental to innocent people (e.g., in S&V, 2018g)—that is, 'innocent white autochthonous (Flemish) people' allegedly suffering from migration.

The becoming of the 'media' as political opponent in its own right—one that is accused of political misrepre-

sentation in the strict sense—comes most strikingly to light in a speech given by the S&V leader at a protest against the government's signing of the UN Marrakesh Migration pact co-organised by the movement (Brussels, 16 December 2018):

Do you really think, dear journalists, that there is anyone here present, who still believes you when you label allochthones who commit crimes in our cities simply as 'youngsters'? Do you really think that there is anyone here present who still believes you when you speak of 'incidents', when we know that it's about Islamic terrorism?…No, dear journalists, your time is over!…Everyone here present realizes that the leftist mainstream media only represents a tiny fraction of our people and that the majority is on our side. (S&V, 2019a, authors' translation)

This quote highlights the representative turn in the S&V discourse on media in several ways. Indeed, although this speech was held at a demonstration against the government's support of the UN Migration Pact, this speech is directly addressed to 'journalists'—not elected or governmental officials. Moreover, when referring to 'the tiny majority' represented by the leftist media, the speaker uses the Dutch verb *vertegenwoordigen*—a verb that refers only to representation in the sense of standing for/speaking for, not in the sense of portrayal. A claim which is then immediately followed by the representative claim by S&V (2019a, authors' translation) itself that "the majority is on our side".

These constructions and the creation of a sense of 'political absence' are particularly noteworthy in a context where Belgian politics are *not* dominated by left-wing parties. Most of the excerpts presented above were published at a time where the right-wing party Flemish party NVA was in government. By claiming that right-wing voices are silenced in this context, the discourse of S&V effectively pushes citizens to seek their 'representation' even further to the right. Van Langenhove's running in the elections for the VB in the May 2019 elections further illustrates this.

5.4. Speaking the Truth as Political Representation

In this last empirical section, we document how the denunciations analyzed above serve as a basis for S&V to claim first to 'speak the truth', but also, to speak for the Flemish youth, the Flemish people and the 'silent majority'. In its discourse about media, S&V builds its representative claims onto a broader argument of 'truth-speaking'. This is rooted in a long tradition of 'new realist' discourse (Prins, 2004) on the (radical) right that claims to 'say things like they are' and break (purported) taboos concerning, especially, multicultural society.

As such, the truth-speaking defended by S&V can be seen as part and parcel of a political struggle to make hegemonic a particular vision of the world. A version of

![Cogitatio logo] **COGITATIO**

reality which is claimed to be censored by media, the cultural sector and universities who are presented as a politically correct left-wing elite. And in a populist move, this view of reality is presented as the view of a 'silent majority' that is opposed to the left-wing dominated media. In this manner, S&V portrays itself as an actor who not only speaks the truth, but crucially, *by* speaking the truth, *speaks for* the silent majority. The representational relationship that is constructed thus goes beyond a populist representative claim—*representing by claiming to know* the ordinary people and their interests and defending them against the elite. S&V also claims to *represent others by claiming an authority over 'truth'*. As such, political representation (representation as standing/speaking for) becomes closely aligned with a much more metapolitical epistemological struggle over representations of reality (representation as portrayal); it becomes a struggle between truth-tellers and liars. As a result, S&V's pretension to speak the truth turns into a representative claim; 'I tell you the truth, therefore I represent you'.

This becomes very explicit in S&V's discourse about setting up its own independent *media* channel. Under the argument that "truth has its own rights" (S&V, 2018q, authors' translation) and that we need "to keep informing Flanders" (S&V, 2018p, authors' translation), S&V seeks not only to tell the truth with its own media channel and media material, but to finally give a voice to the silent majority. Referring to one of their most famous actions (*'t Gravensteen*, March 2018, see Figure 4) and the video thereof, the leader of S&V says:

> We didn't expect the video to go this viral. Even though it was censored on multiple social media plat-

forms, it has been shared and watched over a million times. This shows that there is a huge silent majority that's starting to get a voice. (Interview in the Voice of Europe, 2018)

This idea of giving voice is also physically embodied by the S&V spokesperson himself, who regularly appears with a megaphone in videos and photos (as in this video of their Gravensteen action). The megaphone adds to Van Langenhove's construction as a leader and as a spokesperson who speaks for others, as do the numerous videos and photos showing how people support him and his political efforts (patting him on the shoulder, cheering him on, wanting to take selfies with him).

The politico-representative connotation of S&V's media-channel proposal reaches a pinnacle in the context of Van Langenhove's participation in the Belgian federal elections (May 2019). In the speech announcing his presence as head-of-the-list (*lijsttrekker)* for the radical right party Vlaams Belang, he argues that:

> I will be leading a joint list with the Vlaams Belang for the election of the Federal Parliament. Next to the creation of S&V and the set-up of a new media channel, I am taking-up this third channel because politics is too important to be left in the hands of politicians. (S&V, 2019b, authors' translation)

In his enumeration, Van Langenhove explicitly puts the S&V media channel on a par with running for elections—arguably the most traditional way of politically representing others. But this is not the only instance where media and representative claims are tightly intertwined.

Figure 4. S&V as megaphone of the silent majority.

Beyond 'the silent majority', S&V weaves other representative claims into its critique of media. It claims to know 'Flanders', 'Flemish society', 'the Flemish people' and the 'Flemish youth'; it claims to defend and speak for these groups by equating itself with them. Linguistically, this equation takes place through the use of and shift between pronouns; in particular from 'us' to 'all Flemish', as shown in the excerpt below that refers to the Pano reportage:

> Dear all, be critical; watch the documentary and pay attention to the deliberate attempts by the VRT, which is paid by your taxpayers' money (300 million euros/year), to frame us as a bunch of racists, and all Flemish as a group of extremists. Don't fall in their trap. (S&V ,2018l, authors' translation)

Elsewhere, S&V invokes the Flemish people's bravery and valiance in the face of political oppression to strengthen its own profile as a nationalist rebel and speak on behalf of these 'silenced' groups, and ultimately 'Flemish society':

> They have made it hard for us, but the Flemish doesn't give up. You must continue to question the media because only then can we reduce its grip over Flemish society. Share this video clip and help us in our judicial fight. (S&V, 2018m, authors' translation)

In the first sentence we see the construction of an antagonism between 'they' (the media) and 'us' (S&V) which is equated with 'the Flemish'. In the second sentence this is translated into a direct interpellation of the audience—'you'—as a member of 'the Flemish society', who needs to support S&V in its struggle against the media.

Finally, all these claims also link up closely to the movement's claim to speak on behalf of 'the (Flemish) Youth'. S&V portrays itself as a movement that seeks to trigger a 'positive mental switch' among the youth, one that aims to strengthen the youth's resilience. In this context, S&V sees itself as the very example of 'resilience' by presenting its media activism (the set-up of an independent media channel in particular) as a form of resistance against the system, whilst also presenting its truthtelling as a condition for the Flemish youth to recover its resilience.

6. Conclusion

In this article, we zoomed in on the role of media criticism in the discourse of the Flemish radical right youth movement S&V. We demonstrated that accusations of misportrayal are not merely powerful denunciations of the media. In the discourse of S&V, these attacks actively construct and continuously feed into a broader claim that 'you' and ultimately 'we' are being misrepresented politically; a claim that is intimately connected to S&V's own representative claims. Through our focus on the double meaning of (mis)representation—as portrayal and as speaking for—we documented how the media are discursively constructed as a political actor in their own right—one that is not only in cahoots with the political 'establishment' but who also becomes the target of counter-claims usually reserved for 'illegitimate politicians'. We showed how the media are directly held to account for the silencing of particular voices in the debate, and in some cases, even held accountable for 'the growing problem of migration'. Finally, we documented how an alternative right-wing medium—S&V's independent media channel—is also explicitly presented as an instrument for political representation in the strict sense. It is constructed not only as a means for S&V to 'speak the truth' but also to 'give a voice to 'Flemish society' and 'the silent majority'.

These findings contribute to further our understanding of how the radical right politicizes the media as a non-electoral space of representation and misrepresentation. The media, in S&V discourse, become a representative actor—one that *gives a voice to others* and *represents others*; and crucially, one that can be accused of *not giving a voice to particular groups in society*, of *misrepresenting you* and that can be demanded to become more politically representative of society.

Our analysis also shows how political representation thus becomes closely linked to a more metapolitical struggle over truth and epistemic authority. Indeed, S&V's grievances towards media are not merely about demanding that media represent their point of view (and the point of view of the subjects S&V claims to represent politically). S&V ultimately demands that media represent reality *from their own point of view*, i.e., the one defended by the radical right. S&V's media critique thus contributes to the construction of an uncompromising political battle between those who speak the truth (the radical right) and those who deny that truth, i.e., outright liars (the left and the entire political mainstream).

Our findings also evidence that, contrary to the belief that radical right movements may act in silos or 'echochambers', S&V continuously engages with mainstream media—both by discrediting them as liars and by drawing attention to the content they produce in order to boost their own credibility and prove their arguments (see Holt & Haller, 2018). In other words, the movement uses mainstream media to thrive, it uses the 'politically correct establishment' as political opponent to establish its own authority (in contradictory ways). This has important implications for approaching these movements and their relation to the democratic system as a whole. These are not marginal phenomena on the fringes of society, but actors who are inherently tied to the 'mainstream' in complex ways: they construct their political identity in opposition to a supposedly left-dominated political and media mainstream, derive credibility from both positive and negative attention from mainstream media and politics, and seek inroads into the mainstream to extend their own appeal and reach hegemonic status.

However, our analysis has been limited to one side of the claim-making activity: how S&V denounced the misportrayal and political misrepresentation of certain groups and, in turn, claims to speak on behalf of these groups. As such, our analysis does not inform us on the success of these claims and whether or not they are being contested, accepted or rejected by the groups invoked into being, and their broader audience. Further research is therefore needed to better understand how anti-media discourses affect representational relationships in the broad sense, and in particular people's perceptions and relations to established representative institutions.

Finally, our analysis raises important questions about the ways in which S&V's media critique may grant credibility to the rest of their discourse, in particular on issues of migration, Islam, the nation, but also of masculinity, femininity and the traditional family. By continuously calling out the media's 'untruths' and entangling these denunciations with other types of antagonisms, S&V may come across, in the eyes of its audience, as 'truth-teller' on other matters as well. This aspect certainly merits further attention, especially given the increasing normalization of anti-immigrant discourses worldwide and the retreat of tolerance as core value of our democracies.

Acknowledgments

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

References

Akachar, S. (2018). *Representation in the eye of the beholder? Flemish Muslim youth on (not) feeling politically represented* (Doctoral Thesis in Political Sciences). Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussels.

Bar-On, T. (2007). *Where have all the fascists gone?* London: Routledge.

Bowen, G. A. (2006). Grounded theory and sensitizing concepts. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *5*(3), 12–23.

Bull, S. (2005). *Media and ethnic minorities*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Carpentier, N., & De Cleen, B. (2007). Bringing discourse theory into media studies. *Journal of Language and Politics*, *6*(2), 267–295.

Castiglione, D., & Pollack, J. (2019). *Creating political presence: The new politics of democratic representation*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Charmaz, K. (2003). Grounded theory: Objectivist and constructivist methods. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (pp. 249–291). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

De Cleen, B. (2016). The party of the people versus the cultural elite. Populism and nationalism in Flemish radical right rhetoric about artists. *JOMEC—Journal of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies*, *9*, 70–91.

Dutoya, V., & Hayat, S. (2016). Making representative claims: The social construction of political representation. *Presses de Sciences Po, Revue Française de Science Politique*, *1*(66), 7–25.

Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse. Textual analysis for social research*. London: Routledge.

Glynos, J., & Howarth, D. (2007). *Logics of critical explanation in social and political theory*. London: Routledge.

Guasti, P., & Almeida, D. (2018). *Claims of misrepresentation: A comparison of Germany and Brazil*. Paper presented at the ECPR General Conference, Hamburg, Germany, 22–25 August 2018.

Holt, K., & Haller, A. (2018). Paradoxical populism: How PEGIDA relates to mainstream and alternative media. *Information, Communication & Society*. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1449882

Holt, K., & Haller, A. (2017). What does 'Lügenpresse' mean? Expressions of media distrust on PEGIDA's Facebook pages. *Politik*, *20*(4), 42–57.

Laclau, E. (1977). *Politics and ideology in Marxist theory. Capitalism, fascism, populism*. London: Verso.

Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (2001). *Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics*. London: Verso.

Maly, I. (2018a). Waarom schild en vrienden geen marginaal fenomeen is [Why Schild & Vrienden is not a marginal phenomenon]. *Digitt Magazine*. Retrieved from https://www.diggitmagazine.com/articles/schild-vrienden

Maly, I. (2018b). *Nieuw rechts* [The new right]. Berchem: EPO.

Maly, I. (2018c). *The global New Right and the Flemish identitarian movement Schild & Vrienden: A case study* (Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies No. 220). Tilburg: Department of Culture Studies of Tilburg University.

Misrepresentation. (n.d.). In *Lexico*. Retrieved from https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/misrepresentation

Moffitt, B. (2015). How to perform a crisis: A model for understanding the key role of crisis in contemporary populism. *Government and Opposition*, *50*(2), 189–217.

Pitkin, H. (1967). *The concept of representation*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Prins, B. (2004). *Voorbij de onschuld. Het debat over integratie in Nederland* [Beyond innocence. The debate

on migration in the Netherlands]. Amsterdam: Van Gennep.

Reisigl, M., & Wodak, R. (2001). *Discourse and discrimination: Rhetorics of racism and antisemitism*. London: Routledge.

Rosanvallon, P. (2008). *Counter-democracy: Politics in an age of distrust*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schild & Vrienden. (2018a, January 5). Onze politiek correcte media verzwijgen cruciale elementen van het nieuws. Dat wisten jullie ongetwijfeld al maar het wordt met de dag duidelijker [Facebook status update]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/schildenvrienden/

Schild & Vrienden. (2018b, January 8). The word is out! Het nieuws bij VRT NWS wordt vanaf nu voorgekauwd door Jihad Van Puymbroeck. We kennen Jihad vooral van haar uitspraak [Facebook status update]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/schildenvrienden/

Schild & Vrienden. (2018c, January 26). De mainstream media hebben al een heleboel woorden geschrapt en vervangen. Nu is het woord blank aan de beurt. Het zou te positief klinken en moet daarom voortaan vervangen worden door wit [Facebook status update]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/schildenvrienden/

Schild & Vrienden. (2018d, March 12). De laatste dagen schoten linkse trollen in een kramp. Ze vonden geen antwoord op ons succes en grepen dan maar naar scheldpartijen doodsbedreigingen censuur en leugens. Het ontbreekt hen blijkbaar aan inhoudelijke argumenten [Facebook status update]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/schildenvrienden

Schild & Vrienden. (2018e, April 26). De media negeerden decennialang het groeiende probleem van criminele migranten in onze steden die burgers bestolen hulpdiensten aanvielen en terroristen onderdak gaven. Nu worden de media zelf aangevallen [Facebook status update]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/schildenvrienden/

Schild & Vrienden. (2018f, June 20). De leugenpers van VRT NWS draait weer op volle toeren. Door kwaadwillig cijfers en termen te verdraaien wil VRT u doen geloven dat de migratiestroom naar Europa evenveel vrouwen als mannen bevat [Facebook status update]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/schildenvrienden/

Schild & Vrienden. (2018g, July 7). Moslim migrant uit Niger steekt Duitse vrouw dood en onthoofdt 1-jarige baby op het perron. De Duitse autoriteiten reageren door de huizen binnen te vallen van de mensen die over de feiten berichten en zelfs het parlement wordt gecensureerd [Facebook status update]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/schildenvrienden

Schild & Vrienden. (2018h, July 19). Ons filmpje over de allochtone rellen in Frankrijk werd zonet verwijderd door Facebook na een klacht van VRT. De belasting-

betaler mag blijkbaar de staatspropaganda niet in vraag stellen. VRT is boos omdat bijna een miljoen burgers [Facebook status update]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/schildenvrienden/

Schild & Vrienden. (2018i, August 9). De kanalen van Infowars werden eergisteren tegelijkertijd door Spotify Youtube Google Apple en Facebook verwijderd. Het is duidelijk dat de tech-giganten sommige stemmen niet aan bod willen laten komen zeker in aanloop naar de Amerikaanse tussentijdse verkiezingen [Facebook status update]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/schildenvrienden/

Schild & Vrienden. (2018j, August 13). Dries Van Langenhove werd geïnterviewd door Lana Lokteff van Red Ice. Ze spraken over de ontmoeting met Orban over rolmodellen aan de rechterzijde en over de verschillen tussen Oost en West-Europa. Abonneer zeker op hun youtube kanaal: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCFUC7NaTxZanB_FVOJN92eg [Facebook status update]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/schildenvrienden/

Schild & Vrienden. (2018k, August 23). De afgelopen weken was ons bereik zeer groot. We brachten u de informatie die de massamedia verzwijgen. Daarom blokkeerde Facebook het persoonlijke account van Dries. Je kan de censuur omzeilen door hem op zijn persoonlijke pagina te volgen [Facebook status update]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/schildenvrienden/

Schild & Vrienden. (2018l, September 5). Vanavond zendt VRT een PANO-reportage over Schild & Vrienden uit. De afgelopen maanden filmde VRT tientallen uren positief beeldmateriaal. We mochten de reportage zonet inkijken en constateerden dat VRT al dit positieve beeldmateriaal naar de prullenmand heeft verwezen [Facebook status update]. https://www.facebook.com/schildenvrienden

Schild & Vrienden. (2018m, September 19). Ze hebben het ons moeilijk gemaakt maar de Vlaming is geen opgever. Durf de media in vraag stellen want alleen zo kunnen we hun grip op de samenleving verminderen. Deel dit filmpje en help ons in de juridische strijd [Facebook status update]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/schildenvrienden/

Schild & Vrienden. (2018n, September 26). Emotionele manipulatie. Elke dag opnieuw [Facebook status update]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/schildenvrienden

Schild & Vrienden. (2018o, November 15). De linkse media hebben Dries Van Langenhove maandenlang proberen demoniseren het resultaat zie je in dit filmpje [Facebook status update]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/schildenvrienden/

Schild & Vrienden. (2018p, November 26). Het filmpje over het Marrakesh Migratiepact werd op 2 dagen tijd bijna 400.000 keer bekeken. Tegen morgen zullen een half miljoen Vlamingen geïnformeerd zijn over de inhoud van dit "zelfmoord-pact". Wij kunnen deze

filmpjes enkel blijven maken [Facebook status update]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/schildenvrienden/

Schild & Vrienden. (2018q, December 17). BEWIJS: Brusselse oproerpolitie geeft toe dat burgemeester Close hen heeft opgedragen om er op te kloppen en zo veel mogelijk arrestaties uit te voeren. Ik ben benieuwd of de media dit zullen brengen. DEEL dit filmpje. De waarheid heeft haar rechten! [Facebook status update]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/schildenvrienden/

Schild & Vrienden. (2019a, January 2). Speech Dries Van Langenhove Mars tegen Marrakesh, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eqw9-IVDn3s&feature=youtu.be [Facebook status update]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/schildenvrienden/

Schild & Vrienden. (2019b, January 9). Ik zal een gezamenlijke lijst met Vlaams Belang trekken in Vlaams-Brabant voor het Federale Parlement. Naast de uitbouw van Schild & Vrienden en een nieuw mediakanaal ga ik als partijonafhankelijk activist ook deze derde uitdaging aan want politiek is te belangrijk om over te laten aan politici [Facebook status update]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/schildenvrienden/

Saward, M. (2010). *The representative claim*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Saward, M. (2019). Liminal representation. In D. Castiglione & J. Pollack (Eds.), *Creating political presence: The new politics of democratic representation* (pp. 276–297). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Severs, E. (2012). Substantive representation through a claim-making lens: A strategy for the identification and analysis of substantive claims. *Representation*, *48*(2), 169–181.

Sintomer, Y. (2013). The meanings of political representation: Uses and misuses of a notion. *Raisons politiques*, *2*(50), 13–34.

Viereck, P. (2003). *Metapolitics: From Wagner and the German romantics to Hitler*. New Brunswick, NJ, and London: Transaction Publishers.

Voice of Europe. (2018). There is a huge silent majority that's starting to get a voice: Interview with leader of Belgian patriotic youth group. *Voice of Europe*. Retrieved from https://voiceofeurope.com/2018/03/there-is-a-huge-silent-majority-thats-starting-to-get-a-voice-interview-with-leader-of-belgian-patriotic-youth-group/#.WrPAS5e55iM.twitter

About the Authors

Louise Knops is a Doctoral Student in the Department of Political Science of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. Her research focuses on citizens' expectations and feelings towards representative democracy, in particular through the study of contemporary movements spanning across the Belgian political landscape.
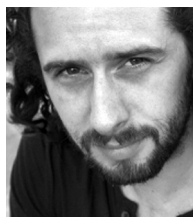
Benjamin De Cleen is Assistant Professor at the Communication Studies Department of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, where he is the Coordinator of the English-Language master on Journalism and Media in Europe. His research is situated within critical discourse studies, and has mainly been focused on radical right rhetoric, and on the discourse-theoretical conceptualization of populism, nationalism and conservatism. Benjamin is the chair of the Centre for Democracy, Signification and Resistance that brings together people from the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, University of Ljubljana, University of Essex, Charles University in Prague, and Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (https://www.researchcenterdesire.eu).