

ARTICLE

Morality in the Populist Radical Right

A Computer-Assisted Morality Frame Analysis of a Prototype*

Job P.H. Vossen**

Abstract

This article provides a computer-assisted morality framing analysis of Vlaams Belang's 2019 manifesto. The VB is regarded in the literature as a prototypical example of the Populist Radical Right (PRR). We first concisely review what PRR politics is and what it consists of, tentatively distinguishing four elements that we hypothesise will materialise in corresponding subframes running throughout the manifesto. We point to a mismatch between the omnipresent role of morality in all PRR subframes and the little attention devoted to the concept in the PRR literature. We introduce a useful theory from social psychology into framing literature to create a novel methodological approach to frame analysis that builds a bridge between a qualitative content and a quantitative context approach. The results support our hypothesis that populism, nationalism, nativism and authoritarianism can be distinguished from one another. Additionally, we detect a fifth PRR subframe, crimmigration, by its unique role of morality.

Keywords: Populist radical right, morality, frame analysis, word2vec, crimmigration.

1 Introduction

Morality and victimisation are frequently invoked as rhetorical devices, and, especially in populist radical right (PRR) discourse, have achieved an iconic status. Consider the PRR slogan 'Defend our people!' Although the slogan leaves open the question of who threatens 'our people', any interpretation of the slogan compels the audience to decide who or what 'our people' require defending from, i.e., what or who is the immoral (threatening) agent.

Although the literature on the PRR has skyrocketed over the last few decades, it lacks consensus as to what exactly makes it 'populist' and what 'radical right' (e.g.

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** Job Vossen is a PhD candidate at the University of Antwerp. His research investigates (im)morality in political discoursing and its interacting with fear, solidarity and gender and sexuality. The corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

Aslanidis, 2018; cf., Berlin et al., 1968). Theoretical and epistemic difficulties have caused the field to be fragmented, and while some approaches locate populism in ideology (Mudde, 2007; Urbinati, 2014), others locate it in discourse (Aslanidis, 2016, 2018; Bonikowski, 2017) and still others in strategies (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Rodrik, 2018) or regimes (Caramani, 2017). Despite this disintegration, the different approaches all underscore the fundamental importance of morality and *us* versus *them* rhetoric in PRR politics (Aslanidis, 2016; Bonikowski, Halikiopoulou, Kaufmann & Rooduijn, 2019; Gidron & Hall, 2020; Müller, 2017; Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Velasco, 2020). It involves a Manichaeic logic of good versus evil, of victim versus villain. Yet despite the obvious importance of morality in PRR politics, the concept is not normally unpacked in the literature using evidence-based theory. There are a few exceptions that look at morality in populism, but they disregard its role in other aspects of the PRR.

The present article addresses this gap and explores the relationship between morality and the key facets of PRR discourse. To this end, we introduce a recent theory of social psychology that provides a useful conceptualisation of morality. Focusing on the PRR through the lens of morality uncovers how different frames cast different entities as victims and wrongdoers. It draws attention to the fact that the ideal-typical elements of PRR politics (populism, nationalism, nativism and authoritarianism) all emerge from a Manichaeic logic of good versus evil.

The article proceeds as follows. We first review pertinent literature on the PRR to help operationalise the term and disentangle its various elements. We then introduce a theory of morality and link it with a social constructivist framing approach to prepare our empirical analysis. Then follows our case study, the 2019 manifesto of the Belgian, Dutch-speaking, party Vlaams Belang (VB). The VB is often put forward as paradigmatic of the PRR (see for a comprehensive party genealogy, De Cleen, 2016). VB's predecessor, the Vlaams Blok, was already diagnosed by Ignazi (1992: 15) as a 'prototypical' example of PRR (for a similar diagnosis see, e.g., de Lange, van der Brug, Baller & Meijers, 2011; Mudde, 2007; Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011). Prototypes are ideal-typical; they are hypothetical postulates never to be fully actualised. The concept dawned in the social sciences via Max Weber, who in turn borrowed it from the natural sciences, where it is used to formulate hypotheses about the potential attributes of undiscovered elements. An ideal-typical example of something unambiguously possesses all quintessential – or typical – characteristics belonging to it. Therefore, VB's recent manifesto provides an exemplary source to investigate how the defining features of the PRR are framed. In what follows we first develop the argument that morality is central to each of these aspects and then proceed empirically, providing evidence that shows *how* morality is framed differentially.

1.1 *Morality in the Populist Radical Right*

The most frequently cited definition of populism in the past decade comes from Cas Mudde (2004: 543), who submits that it is

an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt

elite”, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.

In other words, populism imagines a fundamental tension between public and power holders. It thus comprises two elements, people-centrism and anti-elitism. The elite or establishment, apart from the current government, includes academics, the media, or supranational institutions (Canovan, 1999; cf., De Vries & Hobolt, 2020). This does not mean that populism by itself should be regarded as a pathological symptom of, or threat to, democracy (Canovan, 1999; see also: Berlin et al., 1968; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Müller, 2017). Although it reacts to structures of power, it relies on a framework of legitimacy that is provided by democracy itself. In sum, populism “is democratic in the ‘*vox populi vox dei*’ sense” (Canovan, 1999: 10). It offers “a particular moralistic imagination of politics [where] ‘the people’ is seen as inherently good” (Müller, 2017: 19). The juxtaposition of good versus evil renders it a moral distinction, i.e., an opposition between a marginalised and innocent people versus a malevolent, evil elite. In turn, this “monist and moral distinction between the pure people and the corrupt elite reinforces the idea that a general will exists”. (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017: 16; see also: Urbinati, 2019: 31).

The morality and subsequent *us* versus *them* rhetoric that characterises PRR politics is not restricted to populist people-centrism and anti-elitism. Mudde cautions against placing an overemphasis on populism in the study of the PRR. He defines the PRR “as a combination of nativism, authoritarianism and populism” (2016: 6). The literature on PRR politics agrees that it typically includes nationalist, nativist (ethnic- or ethno-nationalist) and authoritarian propensities but is at odds on the question of which element, if any, is most essential (Bonikowski et al., 2019; De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017; Glasius, 2018; Inglehart & Norris, 2017; Mudde, 2016, 2017b; Rydgren, 2017).

For practical purposes it is useful to start from clear analytical distinctions between the elements that comprise the PRR without allowing too much overlap between them (e.g. De Cleen, 2017). This is a challenging theoretical endeavour because the discursive borders between populism, authoritarianism, nationalism and nativism are not clear-cut or self-evident. On the contrary, the elements inevitably overlap because they work together in creating PRR discourse.

Nationalism and nativism are two constructs that are particularly similar.¹ Both prioritise the *own* over the foreign, but only nativism explicitly construes the *own* as a mirror image of the foreign, which, is hence rendered dangerous. Simplistically put, nationalism is rooted in positive associations with, or bias in favour of, the home country or culture, but nativism is rooted in a negative orientation, and hostility, towards other cultures. Xenophobia more accurately describes nativism than nationalism, although it remains a relative concept that, for example, manifests as scepticism in nationalism and as cynicism or contempt in nativism. Mudde aptly recognises that “labels [such] as ‘Islamophobia’ [have] an unmistakably moralistic dimension” (2017a: 156).

Both nationalism and nativism value national self-determination and (morally) oppose supranational sovereignty, whether at the federal or at the European level,

but only the latter responds to a perceived cultural threat. Although they frequently occur together, this is not required. For example, the Scottish Nationalist Party advocates for independence of Scotland from the UK but is not necessarily anti-multiculturalism or anti-immigration.

Authoritarianism is best understood as ‘accountability sabotage’ (Glasius et al., 2018). As with populism, it requires and reproduces clear moral boundaries (e.g. between state and subject). Most directly, authoritarianism (re)produces “the [moral] distinction between ‘the good people’ and criminals and other deviants” (De Cleen, 2016: 234; cf., Foucault, 1961 [2003]; Goffman, 1963).

Authoritarianism, in contradistinction to populism, is inherently undemocratic. It threatens fundamental human rights (e.g. to fair trial) and freedoms (e.g. of religion or of speech) and demands from its citizens conformity to prescriptive behaviours. Because obedience is rendered moral, defying these prescriptive behaviours is immoral and legitimises severe punishment (Glasius, 2018; Mudde, 2016).

Though morality plays a crucial role in all four characteristics of the PRR, there is strikingly little research that investigates this systematically. We propose a methodology that helps to disentangle discursive frames corresponding to the different characteristics of the PRR and to uncover how they are imbued with morality. Our empirical analysis inquires whether these frames occur in VB’s latest manifesto and whether they are exhaustive or if additional frames can be distinguished. We are interested primarily in the exact role that morality plays in each frame and how it determines the problem definition of a frame and demarcates subframes from each other.

1.2 *Morality Framing*

The scarcity of studies focusing on morality in the PRR literature is striking given the potential of morality to mobilise people. The Manichean logic of good versus evil is understandable to everyone and not only includes people, but morally obliges them to take a position (see also the morality policy literature, e.g. Hurka, Knill & Rivière, 2017; Mooney & Schuldt, 2008). We conceptualise morality using the theory of dyadic morality (TDM: Gray, Young & Waitz, 2012). TDM does not, as do most theories of morality (e.g. Haidt, 2001; but see also Thijssen & Verheyen, 2020), attempt to taxonomise morality. Instead, disregarding the substantive, value-laden, *content* of discourse, it focuses on its *form*, i.e. on the juxtaposition of subject (agent) and object (patient) of (im)morality. In other words, TDM explains the blueprint, or basic template, of the formal structure in which morality appears. All morally significant behaviours, beliefs or judgments are dyadically composed of subjects (causal agents) and objects (affected patients). Represented as a formula,

$$(\text{Im})\text{morality} = \text{Agency (of Agent)} + \text{Experience (of Patient)} \text{ (Wegner \& Gray, 2016: 23).}$$

The deposition of thinking dyadically, in terms of cause and effect (when it comes to morality), is psychological rather than ‘rational’ (i.e. epistemically accurate; cf., Hume, 1739) and forms the very basis of our syntax, reasoning and communicating.

Linguistic scholarship suggests that immoral, threatening agents (referent subjects) are usually included in sentences as the grammatical subjects and are attributed more agency and intentionality, thus deserving more blame and punishment, compared with patients, which are instead included as syntactic objects (Strickland, Fisher, Keil & Knobe, 2014; Strickland, Fisher & Knobe, 2012). TDM is fully compatible with historicism and its conclusion that there need not be *absolute* moral or immoral behaviours or judgments. It is entirely plausible that what is considered morally laudable by one group may be regarded as amoral (morally insignificant) or immoral (evil or morally reprehensible) by yet another. This is even likely to occur because morality is highly sensitive to cultural variation and framing processes.

TDM is compatible with the framing literature. In this literature, frames are generally understood as culturally contingent interpretation schemes that structure the meaning of reality. Frames “are defined by what they omit as well as include” (Entman, 1993: 54), i.e., they may contain latent messages (Van Gorp, 2005: 487). TDM explains how ambiguous morality frames (i.e., frames that lack either a causal agent or affected patient) compel people to complete a full-fledged frame. We follow Entman’s (1993: 53) definition of frames as being constituted of “elements to construct an argument about problems and their causation, evaluation, and/or solution”. As such, framing implies selection and omission; highlighting certain aspects while concealing others and pervasively influencing public opinion and people’s reactions (Entman, 1993; Gamson, 1992; Goffman, 1974; Iyengar, 2005; Sunstein, 2005; Tversky & Kahneman, 1984; Van Gorp, 2005; Zaller, 1992). Yet, in contrast to Entman (1993; but also Gamson, 1992; Vossen, Van Gorp & Schulpen, 2018), we argue that the evaluative aspect of frames need not be moral but can, instead, be wholly amoral, i.e., morally insignificant. Whereas such technical frames may emphasise monetary, logistic, information, morality frames make matters subject to moral evaluations, say, about responsibility. Notwithstanding this analytical distinction, it is this second type of framing, morality framing, that frame analysts are usually concerned with (e.g. Entman, 1993; Gamson, 1992; Snow & Benford, 1988).

Ample previous empirical research (De Cleen, 2016; de Lange et al., 2011; Ignazi, 1992; Mudde, 2007; Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011) has labelled the Flemish right-wing party VB as a PRR party. A close analysis of VB’s 2019 party manifesto is therefore likely to uncover *how* the different elements of the PRR (populism, nationalism, nativism and authoritarianism) are moralised through framing. We hypothesise that the 2019 manifesto of VB contains frames that correspond to the four elements. Using an innovative methodological approach, we test whether these subframes can be identified and demarcated from each other in VB’s 2019 manifesto and whether they exhaust it or whether additional frames can be detected.

2 Data and Method

In Belgium's 2019 elections, the VB once again achieved significant electoral successes after almost two decades of losing votes. They went from 6 to 23 seats in the Flemish Parliament, becoming the second largest party, and from three to 18 seats in Federal Parliament. They also achieved the greatest win – sharing first place – in the European Parliament. This unprecedented victory by itself warrants close investigation. Moreover, because the elections of May 2019 were held for all three levels simultaneously, VB's 2019 manifesto presents a unique opportunity to study how the party connects regional, federal and supranational policy frames and imbues them with morality.

In order to reliably detect and distinguish between subframes we employed a mixed method approach consisting of an in-depth qualitative frame analysis that receives support from a quantitative frame analysis that regards the context of key concepts of a subframe. These key concepts are identified in the qualitative assessment. Building a bridge between qualitative content analysis, on the one hand, and quantitative context analysis, on the other, thus attempts to reduce observer bias and provide statistical support for our hypothesised qualitative distinctions. The two mutually complement each other where the frame analysis benefits from the descriptive statistics provided by the quantitative analysis, which in turn relies on input from the qualitative analysis and a priori theoretical considerations about populism, nationalism, nativism and authoritarianism.

2.1 Qualitative Frame Analysis

Political discourse and framing strategies are normally studied using qualitative content analysis or types of frame analysis. As is customary in frame analysis, our computer-assisted morality frame analysis borrows the concepts *diagnosis*, *aetiology*, *prognosis* and *intervention* from the medical sciences to explain what morality frames look like. A prototypical morality frame explicitly includes a *diagnosis* that defines the situation as either moral – having to do with help – immoral – having to do with harm – or amoral – having nothing to do with help or harm. The diagnosis includes an evaluation of its *aetiology*, i.e., of the causal explanation offered by the frame. As such, an aetiology encompasses the causal agent and the patient. The dyadic morality that is implied by an aetiology need not be explicit. The aetiology may omit reference to either the agent (subject) or the patient (object). Note that neither (agent nor patient) need refer to a human being. Morality may instead be directed at the economy, specific values or institutions. Finally, an unambiguous problem diagnosis that includes a full aetiology heuristically points to what is likely to happen (*prognosis*) and, antithetically, how this can be solved (*intervention*).

Each identified subframe is taken apart, and both the components and the whole are scrutinised. We first report how a subframe *diagnoses* a scenario as (im) moral; this involves an analysis of the frame's *aetiology* and an abstraction of the elements – i.e. the causal agent and affected patient – that moralise a frame. The *prognosis* is simply the actualisation or exacerbation of the threat, culminating in crisis, chaos and moral disorder (anomie). This heuristically points to the (only)

intervention or cure (cf., Sunstein, 2005). Although some subframes explicitly include a prognosis and intervention, the innate logic of a morality frame implicitly points to what can be expected if adequate interventions are not taken. In the case of an ambiguous frame, we discuss what is tacitly implied by it.

2.2 Quantitative Word Vector Analysis

Over the last few years, quantitative types of automated content analysis have gained much popularity (e.g. Kroon, Trilling & Raats, 2021). Compared with human coding, computational analysis is much more reliable because exactly the same results are achieved if a method is used repeatedly on the same data. We use state-of-the-art methodology to strengthen our frame analysis and help redefine our object of investigation (PRR politics).

Our computer-assisted morality frame analysis is reliable, easy to work with and yields face valid results that help explain value-laden discourse. RStudio's package *word2vec* (Mikolov et al., 2013) is used to transform tokens (words and word pairs) into vectors and estimate their similarities. *Word2vec* transforms tokens into vectors using only the word order of the manifesto. Words are thus treated as disorthogonal vectors that derive their numeric value, i.e., their meaning, from their relation to each other. Word embedding analysis estimates the similarity between concepts and expresses this similarity in cosines. Cosine similarities are easy to interpret; as with correlation, the closer this number gets to 1, the higher the similarity, whereas words that oppose each other in 90 degrees in the multidimensional vector space are unrelated and yield a cosine of 0. Specifically, we use *word2vec* to train a word embedding model for the manifesto and to predict the context of key words (such as 'people'). Using words that are essential to a subframe helps to mark the subframes' edges (by showing where they may overlap) and to demarcate different subframes from each other.

The cosine similarity (or euclidean distance) between two vectors provides an indication of the linguistic or semantic similarity of the two. By mapping words to numeric vectors and representing these in a multidimensional vector space, words that are conceptually alike will cluster together and form a frame.

A statistical analysis of frames gives some support for differentiating between subframes. It requires looking for words that convey (and create) *meaning*. Therefore, we filter out noise such as stop words. We also account for the fact that the formal structure of words is grammatically contingent by stemming and tokenising individual words (or unigrams) and word pairs (bigrams). This process instructs the computer which token (pair)s are conceptually identical and which rather similar (synonyms). Tokens are more alike when they co-occur frequently. Because of the inherent logical structure of natural language, next to synonyms, antonyms are rated similar. Antonyms negatively mirror the target word (pair). 'Defence', for instance, is similar to, yet also the opposite of, 'attack'; think only of the word 'fence' or 'fending', which are forms of attack yet are derived from the same word stem as 'defence'.

2.3 Data

The party manifesto comes from the Manifesto Project Database, which is an online repository for party manifestos and is freely accessible. In total, VB's 2019 manifesto includes 42,097 words. Forty thousand words is a small sample for training word embeddings. However, because we use it only to support the frame analysis with basic descriptive statistics, and not to tackle any serious methodological problems, the size is sufficient. (Using word2vec on much larger data sets enables solving complex analogies such as '*man* is to *king* as *woman* is to ...'. The unsupervised machine-learning algorithm that underlies word2vec will accurately predict the answer to this analogy as '*queen*'.)

We are concerned mainly with words (combinations) that are salient, that characterise a frame and that therefore occur relatively frequently (e.g. the word 'our' occurs 550 times). Cosine word similarities cannot be computed for words that occur but once or twice and, as a rule of thumb, word (pairs) that occur less than ten times, e.g. 'authority', are excluded. Data and replication instructions can be found in the supplementary materials.

3 Results and Discussion

VB has been assuming an increasingly populist character since its 1987 parliamentary election campaign – when it also first utilised a simple three-word slogan: 'Our nation first' ('*Eigen volk eerst!*', based on French Front National's '*Le français d'abord*'). By 2019 this had been rearranged to (the slightly less exclusive) 'First our people' ('*Eerst onze mensen*').

The central section of VB (2019)'s 100-page manifesto, entitled 'Defending our people' ('*Onze mensen beschermen*') is almost double the length of the first and the last sections. According to its title, this middle section deals explicitly with victimisation, protectionism and securitisation. Because of its overarching significance in the manifesto as a whole as well as in the pamphlet (see Figure 1), we took this to be the master frame [MF]: '*defending our people!*' (*protectionism*) and analysed the manifesto in its entirety (see: Snow & Benford, 1988, for use of the concept master frame).

The PRR ideal-typically juxtaposes an (unspecified) threatening referent subject against 'our people'. That the referent object requires defending means, first, that it is something to be cherished and that, by implication, is vulnerable. The urgency that is conveyed by making this the campaign slogan and title of the manifesto only serves to emphasise the scale of the threat and to allude to potential crises if adequate measures are not taken.

The master frame is divided into five subframes that are chosen and labelled on the basis of a combination of inductive and deductive inquiry. We tentatively defined four of the five frames – populism, nationalism, nativism and authoritarianism – in our introduction as crucial elements of PRR politics (e.g. De Vries & Hobolt, 2020; Margalit, 2019). The frames we identified are summed up in Table 1. Table 2 features the cosine similarities of subframes' key concepts. In what follows we discuss each subframe individually, analyse the role that morality plays

in them, and examine frames' outlines by considering which words are essential to it and which are less essential or also encompassed by another frame.

Table 1 *Computer-Assisted Morality Frame Analysis of VB's 2019 Party Manifesto*

<i>Aetiology</i>					
Frame	Agent	Diagnosis	Patient	Prognosis	
[MF] Protectionism	All agents listed below	Ontological/existential threat	All patients listed below	Crisis & anomie	Defending our people
[1] Populism	The political/cultural elite	Belgium is a partocracy	The people		Democracy
[2a] Euroscepticism	European Union	Critically infringes upon	Flemish sovereignty	Loss of economy, freedom, subsidiarity, democracy and rule of law	Take back sovereignty
[2b] Separatism	Wallonia		Flanders	Institutional crises, increasing taxes and lower wages create a new class of working poor	Separatism
[3] Nativism	Islamic values		Western Values	A fifth column of Islamic extremists and terrorism	Stopping immigration
[4] Authoritarianism	Leftist ideology	Terrorism threat	The Flemish (people)	Loss of identity and increased criminality	Declaring state of emergency
[5] Crimmigration	Immigrants	Cause criminality at the cost of	Vulnerable Flemish people	Loss of economy, social security, safety and identity	Law and order

Table 2 *Top Word Similarities Per Subframe from VB’s 2019 Party Manifesto (Cosine > 0.57)*

[1a] People-centrism	Citizen	Ordinary, gap between, representative, democracy, referendum , plebiscite
	Stopping, wealth, traditions, solidarity, productivity, health, safety	
[1b] Anti-establishment	Democracy	Particracy, politicians, vote, power, legitimacy, cleavage between
	Particracy, voters, elections, parties, cleavage between	
	Democratic, defend, billions, contributed, position, politically correct	
[2a] Euroscepticism	Europe	Super state, nations, member states, sovereignty
	Fleming, EU super state, member states, totalitarian, billion euros	
[2b] Separatism	Walloon	Unitary, separation, communitarianism, Fleming, institutional
	Separation, democratic, competences, unitary, Francisation	
	Legitimacy, borders, solidarity, democracy, independence, sovereignty, governments, elite, pride	

[3] Nativism	<p>Our</p> <p>Individual, traditions, origin, our, Islamisation, adjust, language</p> <p>Numbers, non-European, groups, allochthones,² Rupo,³ development aid</p> <p>Refugees, rules, origin, residence permit, illegals, repatriation</p>	<p>Life/living, identity, traditions, culture, values, society, Islamisation</p>
[4] Authoritarianism	<p>Law enforcement</p> <p>External borders, military, Islamic, cultural, traditions, stop</p>	<p>Decisive action, judges, police, safe, punished</p>
[5] Crimmigration	<p>Policy</p> <p>Community service, released, security policy, foreigner/stranger</p>	<p>Crime, mass, immigration</p>
[N/A] Economy	<p>Economy</p> <p>Pays, euro per, Fleming, costs, amounts, member states</p>	<p>Job market, innovation, simultaneous, positive, sustainable</p>

² Literally: 'not-from-here persons'.
³ The minister-president of Wallonia.

The first [1] subframe, populism, as we expected from our literature review, consists of people-centrism and anti-elitism, each associated with its own set of words. Flemish sovereignty, its economy, freedom, identity, way of life and, more generally, the 'ordinary Flemish people' – everyone who "leads an ordinary life, who studies, is employed, saves money and raises children" (VB, 2019: 37) – must be defended. Ordinary life is increasingly under attack by a cultural and political elite. Word embeddings show that the word 'ordinary' is most similar to 'citizen', followed by 'democracy', 'representative' and 'particracy'. What it means to be an ordinary citizen, i.e., or 'the people', and what it means to have a representative democracy, can be understood in part based on this contraposition to the word particracy. Analogously, consider the word particracy as photographic negative of democracy, the one is inherently good and legitimate which makes the other inherently evil and corrupt. Likewise, the word most similar to 'parliament' and 'democracy' is 'particracy', followed by 'voters', 'elections', 'parties', 'politicians', 'the same' and

‘cleavage between’. Not only does participatory refer to an imbalance of power, where parties are the primary basis of rule rather than the demos, but it is also rendered the political status quo in which politicians fool and exploit the citizens. The frame diagnoses a “cleavage between citizen and politics” (VB, 2019: 12) and casts parties as immoral, “treating the government as their property” (VB, 2019: 12). The following passage is illustrative of the subframe:

The citizen increasingly has the feeling he [sic] is being silenced in this country. Belgium is not a democracy but a participatory. In Belgium, party headquarters decide, not the citizens. The political elite deliberately protects its own position and resorts to self-service with political appointments. Politicians only act as if they strongly disagree with each other with an eye at the elections while, behind the scenes, they haggle with applications and prearrangements. (VB, 2019: 11; emphasis added)

The word ‘identity’ has no real negatives among its top similarities (see Table 2). Except for ‘stopping’, which implies a reaction to something bad, all words in Table 2 are positive synonyms or adjectives. It is categorised under the subframe populism because group identity and solidarity are products of people being driven together, being united to defend ‘the people’. This categorisation is, moreover, congruent with the data; first, it has no words among its top similarities that remind of the other frames, and, second, the words that are closely associated with it, like ‘solidarity’ and ‘traditions’, characterise the nature, or essence, of ‘the people’. As anticipated, anti-elitism in VB’s manifesto is unambiguously expressed. This is illustrated by the finding that the word ‘elite’ is most similar to the word ‘democratic’. Their relationship is strong because they are often framed together as incompatible and negatively mirroring each other: ‘democracy’ is (morally) juxtaposed with the ‘elite’. The intervention presented by the frame is simple: vote for the only party that “aims for policy which benefits not the political elite, but the nation” (VB, 2019: 59).

The second [2] subframe is Flemish nationalism and includes [2a] Euroscepticism and [2b] separatism. The first juxtaposes the European Union (agent) with the Flemish and national sovereignty (patient) because:

in its current shape, it is determined to take away more competences from its individual member states and goes against the grain of a healthy European mindset’ (“staat haaks op een gezonde Europese gedachte”). (VB, 2019: 19)

It “makes everything its business” (VB, 2019: 36) and is “evolving towards becoming a super-state, a United States of Europe” (VB, 2019: 18); therefore, the EU threatens not only Belgium’s and Flemish’s sovereignty but also their economy, freedom, subsidiarity, democracy and the rule of law (*ibid.*). Word embedding analysis indicates the word ‘superstate’ is strongly associated with ‘Europe’, and so is the word ‘sovereignty’. ‘EU’ is most strongly associated with ‘Fleming’ and also with ‘superstate’. “The EU is increasingly showing its totalitarian tendencies ... the EU-elite does not care about whatever the average Flemish, Italian or Danish person thinks” (VB, 2019: 19). Note that Euroscepticism can be infused with

populism, as in this example, which contains people-centrism and anti-elitism. The frame morally juxtaposes a defenceless Fleming with an almighty EU with its own, self-serving, agenda. It wants to expand ever further, first by making Turkey a member state. A flood of refugees would follow as Turkish people 'seize the opportunity' and settle elsewhere within the EU (VB, 2019: 20-21).

As in the first subframe, the only intervention that remains is for the people to vote for the party so that they can fulfil their promises. Concretely, in this regard, "Islamic countries cannot become member states of the EU" (VB, 2019: 21). They, furthermore, propose to abolish the Schengen Agreement because this "simply means we are no longer boss over our own borders" (VB, 2019: 19). More generally, they seek to abolish 'useless EU-institutions' and both the European Committee and parliament (VB, 2019: 19-20).

The second piece of Flemish nationalism is separatism [2b]. The frame casts the current federal government as consisting, fundamentally, of 'two democracies' that run counter to one another (VB, 2019: 7).² The government is therefore the immoral agent. The frame diagnoses a "left and Marxist oriented Walloons [stands] diametrically opposed to a right and liberal-oriented ('vrijheidslievend') Flanders" (VB, 2019: 7) and this prognosis inevitably results "in new institutional crises" (*ibid.*). This is because the two democracies are evolving in different directions – e.g. "the challenge in Flanders is job supply whereas that in Wallonia is job demand (unemployment)" (VB, 2019: 38).

The economy, in this frame, is included both as a patient and as prognosis:

Taxes are sky high ("torenhooft") because Flemish people are made to pay for the expenses of the Walloon ("Waalse rekening"), creating a "new class of working poor". (VB, 2019: 37)

In other words, ordinary people have unjust costs as it is, which will only be exacerbated (prognosis) under the current administration. The frame's intervention is for Flanders to have its "own economic policy tailored to the Flemish economy" (VB, 2019: 38) and be able to lower taxes and make them transparent (VB, 2019: 36). It is complete separatism because "all attempts to create a political structure that gives due to each [Flanders and Wallonia] [are] doomed to fail" (VB, 2019: 7). Concretely, they would draw up a 'separation treaty with Wallonia', that is, they would form a separate nation with its own new constitution that retains Brussels as its (bilingual) capital (VB, 2019: 7-8).

Quantitatively, the word 'Walloon' co-occurs with 'independence' and 'unitary' and with none of the words associated with the other subframes, suggesting separatism warrants its own subframe. The word-clot is most closely related to positive goals that VB aims for such as 'separation', 'competences', and 'communitarianism' and to a few words such as 'Francisation', and, of course, 'Walloon', which VB aims to negate.

The word 'nation' has less exclusivist word similarities than the words 'our' and 'society', which, because of their association with Islamisation, are included as nativist rather than nationalist words. The top word associations of 'nation' include 'legitimacy', 'borders', 'independence', 'sovereignty' and 'governments' (plural), all

of which seem to indicate the Flemish, not Belgian nationalism. Finally, the words ‘pride’ and ‘elite’ are similar to ‘nation’. This suggests populism is not confined to Euroscepticism but extends to separatism. That there is a link between populism and (Flemish) nationalism is not at all surprising. Conceptually, the nation and one of the elements of populism, people-centrism, are intertwined, and empirically, nationalism frequently co-occurs with populism.

The third [3] subframe, nativism, casts the native culture, identity and sovereignty as being threatened by increased globalisation and the mindset of the current “leftist government” and “anonymous share-keepers” (VB, 2019: 35). Together they have brought about immigration-liberalism, or a “bed-bath-breakfast perspective” (VB, 2019: 58). The resultant ideological programme made for the worst deportation rates of Europe and will culminate in economic hardship (VB, 2019: 28). To make this more provocative, VB juxtaposes the asylum seeker with the pensioner – personifying the Fleming in general – stating,

the government spends more money on asylum seekers, who have never contributed to our social security, than it does on our own elderly who have been paying for our social security for decades. (VB, 2019: 59)

Nativism, like nationalism, can use people-centrism (and, at least theoretically, anti-elitism), for instance:

For people like you and me, each asylum seeker costs 1249 euro a month. This is more than the average pension. Our government chooses to place asylum seekers above pensioned who have paid their whole life for the public treasury [and] social security. (VB, 2019: 62)

Apart from the economic (e.g. social security) costs, this ideological mindset of the current government threatens the very way of life and being, the identity, of the ordinary people. The clear prognosis here is that ordinary people will start to “feel like strangers in their own country” (VB, 2019: 25). All proposed remedies are bordering practices that either prohibit immigration or limit new forms of (economic) migration and family reunion (e.g. VB, 2019: 27).

In the section entitled ‘putting a stop to Islamisation’, they point to what they argue is the root cause (aetiology): “Islamic values [which stand] in sharp moral juxtaposition to Western values” (VB, 2019: 31) that include freedom and equality between man and woman. Excluded from the agents are “allochthonous girls” (VB, 2019: 30) who are framed as patients that have to be protected from give-away marriage practices, held customary among immigrants. Interestingly, in this particular case, the Islamic customs are juxtaposed with ‘Western values’, not Flemish values. This broader juxtaposition serves to increase the cleavage with Islamic values. This, in effect, integrates allochthonous girls with the victims of Islam, that is, among ‘the people’. In other words, allochthonous girls are instrumentalised in the process of scapegoating Islam.

Word embeddings suggest the keywords ‘our’ and ‘society’ are similar to the positives ‘traditions’, ‘culture’ and ‘values’. They are both also quantitatively similar

to the big negative ‘Islamisation’. This fits with our theorising that VB morally juxtaposes the native versus the nonnative and, specifically, versus the Islam. The words ‘stranger/foreigner’ and ‘immigrants’ are statistically similar to different words that are qualitatively quite synonymous. The strongest similarity is with the word ‘numbers’. Framing immigration as a logistic problem dehumanises foreigners to quantifiable objects. Other similar words include ethnic attributes, such as ‘non-European’ and ‘origin’, or references to status, such as ‘residence permit’, ‘illegals’ and ‘repatriation’. Finally, one negative emerged among the words most similar to ‘stranger/foreigner’, namely minister-president of Wallonia ‘Rupo’. Rupo is the one scapegoat put forward in the manifesto who is responsible for the immigration liberalism and decline of Flemish identity.

Penultimately [4], VB’s authoritarianism frame regards immigration as having constituted distinct security threats (agents) by itself. Among these are illegality (of residence), criminality and terrorism. The section entitled ‘merciless tackling of (*aanpakken van*) Islamic terrorism’ most distinctly borders over from nativism to authoritarianism. It speaks of the ‘continuous threat of terrorism’ (VB, 2019: 47&56) and argues that “Islamic extremism inspired over ten attacks over ten years” (VB, 2019: 55). Although it is clear who is the threatening causal agent, unlike in the previous frames, it is not made explicit who or what is threatened by terrorism and Islamic extremism. That this is ‘the ordinary citizen’ or ‘the people’ is very much implied and required for dyadic completion. The intervention that is suggested starts with “drying up the breeding ground, namely Islam” (VB, 2019: 56). Associating Islam with terrorism, i.e. with fear for its own sake, warrants severe infringements on several fundamental human rights. This is a textbook example of authoritarianism. Still more paradigmatically, the VB proposes:

the declaration of a state of emergency so that known radicalised Muslims can be locked up preventively ... conform art. 15 of the European Convention on Human Rights. (VB, 2019: 56-57)

Word embedding analysis of the unigrams ‘police’ and ‘terrorism’ show little overlap with the words associated with the other frames, supporting the idea that authoritarianism constitutes a stand-alone frame. The bigram ‘law enforcement’ – which is statistically similar to ‘decisive action’, ‘police’, and ‘punished’ – characterises the PRR’s authoritarian, law and order, frame. The word ‘terrorism’ is associated not only with Islam and the non-native but also with the word ‘military’. Finally, next to declaring a state of emergency, the frame proposes some extreme measures, such as “limiting medical help of illegals to life-threatening situations and attach it to repatriation” (VB, 2019: 29), that are evidently authoritarian but cross over into a fifth frame that we identified.

The final [5] subframe, crimmigration, is borrowed from criminology and immigration law, where it marks “the convergence of immigration and criminal law” (Stumpf, 2006: 367). Crimmigration frames carefully juxtapose two groups, casting each (the crimmigrants) as a threat to the other’s (‘the people’s’) physical (and moral) well-being. The logic that comes with perceived (threat of) victimisation intimates that the first group is culpable, and *evil*, while it renders the latter

innocent and morally good (Brouwer, Van der Woude & Van der Leun, 2017; García Hernández & Cuauhtémoc, 2013). Although some would argue this can simply be subsumed under nativism (or authoritarianism), our analysis indicates that the crimmigration frame is not exhausted by nativism and authoritarianism but that it infuses aspects of both, as well as of populism, while still providing a distinctive framing of morality that renders it a stand-alone frame.

Criminality and illegality caused by immigration, or ‘crimmigration’ as the VB calls it on several occasions on their official website and in party slogans (see Figure 1), is framed in both economic and physical terms. The crimmigration frame blends penal populism and criminal law together with immigration policy and Islamophobia. In the middle of the central section, titled ‘Protecting our people’, in the paragraph headlined ‘Stopping stranger criminality’, they argue that “more than one out of three suspected offenders are foreigners”³ and that

non-Europeans are six times more likely to engage in criminal activities than are Belgians ... One detainee costs our community about 146 euros a day. Almost half of the prisoner population consists of foreigners.⁵ [This amounts to a cost of] hundreds of millions a day. (VB, 2019: 54-55)

The interventions that follow this logic resemble the preceding interventions reported in the other frames: to take back border control and sovereignty so that the government can limit citizenship and restrict or send back anyone who is unwelcome.

Word embedding analysis supports isolating crimmigration as a distinct subframe. This is illustrated by the words ‘foreigner/stranger’ that are closely associated with ‘criminals’. More revealing still, as an example of the pervasive influence of morality frames on political discourse, the word ‘policy’ (which is very much politically salient) is most similar to the words ‘crime’, ‘mass’ and ‘immigration’. The strong association of these terms together with the observation that ‘policy’ is not associated with any particular words that comprise the other subframes suggests it is apt to speak of a fifth distinct frame.

Our quantitative and qualitative analysis both support the idea that the crimmigration frame cannot be subsumed under nativism or authoritarianism and provide a distinctive framing of morality that renders it a stand-alone frame. Stated differently, the idiosyncratic causal analysis of morality with an unambiguous focus on the individual suggests that the crimmigration frame constitutes a distinct subframe. In our analysis of the other frames, we observe that nativism is more about cultural values, populism about elites and authoritarianism about legitimacy. Crimmigration is about the convergence of immigration and penal law and differs from these most visibly in terms of its unique moral aetiology, which casts individual immigrants as responsible scapegoats.

Figure 1 'Defend Our People! Crimmigrants Out'.



4 Conclusion: Defending our People

By looking at the PRR through the lens of morality, this article uncovers how the elements that constitute the PRR differ from each other because of varying causal analyses that they offer and in which unique entities are cast as (morally) responsible or as victimised. Populism, for instance, constructs a moral juxtaposition between 'the [innocent/good] people' and 'the [threatening/evil] elite'. Our qualitative frame analysis shows that, in fact, all ideal-typical elements of the PRR (nationalism, nativism and authoritarianism) emerge from a Manichaean logic that juxtaposes an *evil* subject with a *good* object. It is this juxtaposition of agent versus patient that moralises a frame.

Using a recent theory of social psychology, we focus on the essence of each subframe from an Archimedean platform that acknowledges contextual and temporal variability while specifying the structural elements that morality consists of. The methodological focus on morality throughout the subframes pinpointed the role of identity (re)formation (e.g. Velasco, 2020). That is, all subframes comprise both an agent (or referent subject, e.g. 'the Marxist leftists') and a patient (or referent object, e.g. 'the vulnerable Flemish people'), and they are assigned various attributes. The precise identification is of utmost importance as it makes the difference between whether a frame resonates with the audience and is accepted or not. The most frequently encountered attributes refer to gender (roles), ethnicity, religion and ideology. Each of these is associated with stereotyped beliefs and (implicit) bias.

The patient of the master frame 'our people' runs throughout all the subframes. The economy and cultural identity of the 'ordinary Flemish people' are threatened by various culprits besides the elites. Most directly, they are defenceless against loss of social security and of industry and jobs. Yet, besides logistic problems,

Flanders' citizens are also threatened by rising criminality and detainee and immigration costs. Although each subframe has its own specific agent and patient, left-wing ideology, 'the people' and the economy play a role in all frames albeit in different ways. Left-wing ideology threatens national sovereignty by facilitating, and in turn being instigated by, the EU, globalisation and immigration liberalism. The nativist fear of losing identity also features as a significant threat throughout all subframes although it also constitutes its own subframe. The clear prognosis here is that ordinary people will start to "feel like strangers in their own country" (VB, 2019: 25 see also, e.g., Hochschild, 2018).

Next to 'the people' the role of the economy runs through almost all subframes. Our word embedding analysis could not pin the words 'economy' and 'euro' to a specific subframe. Only the second subframe casts the Flemish taxpayers as victims, paying off Wallonian bills. In the other frames, economic crisis is included as prognosis. As in the medical sciences, crisis means that there is no longer control over the vital parts of the body politic or of the nation. In democratic politics, these vital parts start with sovereignty, the rule of law and democratic legitimacy as 'the will of the people' and end with the nation's borders and economy. Of these vital parts, the economy is perhaps most salient and most manifest. Yet because (like borders and other constructs) it is very much a human creation (e.g. Marx, 1867 [2018]), it is subject to interpretation and framing processes. Zero-sum economic rhetoric serves to point out more distal crises. Loss of economy feeds, for example, back into the available capacity and resources to deal with (illegal or criminal) immigrants, which in turn results in more criminality and undocumented immigrants who cannot be detained any longer after having been processed. The role of the economy and its relationship to different PRR elements merits further academic attention.

Notwithstanding the central importance of morality in all elements of the PRR, the subframes corresponding to them vary from each other by who or what they cast as subject and object. Our quantitative context analysis provides further support for the hypothesis that the prototypical PRR manifesto includes at least one subframe per ideal-typical element of PRR politics. The word embeddings further corroborate the PRR literature's claim that [1] populism comprises [1a] people-centrism and [1b] anti-elitism (e.g., Aslanidis, 2018) and that the second subframe that we identified, [2] Flemish nationalism, consists of [2a] Euroscepticism and [2b] separatism (e.g. De Vries & Hobolt, 2020). The frames [3] nativism, and [4] authoritarianism, are, like the other subframes, each associated with their own set (or cluster) of words. Yet, especially, subframes [3] nativism and [4] authoritarianism significantly overlap with a fifth frame we isolated. This subframe, [5] 'cimmigration', is an innovative mixture of components of the other frames (mainly of nativism and authoritarianism) that constitute its own subframe rather than be subsumed under one of the others, first because of the distinctive words associated with it (that fall outside the borders of the other frames) and, second, because of the unique role morality plays in it. Analogously, colours (like subframes) are named and distinguished rather arbitrarily (e.g. at what wavelength do we start speaking of 'red', and where does it become 'yellow'). Yet *difference* is necessary in order to speak of, and compare, the exceptional qualities of distinct things such as

colours (cf., Derrida, 1967 [2001]). The boundary between different colours, however, is not black and white but allows many shades of grey. In some cases where colours overlap, a new colour can be identified (e.g. 'orange' at the nexus of 'red' and 'yellow'). Such is the case with the fifth subframe that we identify in VB's discourse: crimmigration, which has its own causal explanation that directly holds individual immigrants responsible rather than referring to more ultimate causal agents such as the leftist globalist ideology of the current government, as is the case in populism and authoritarianism. Future research investigating crimmigration should take note of its close resemblance to other PRR subframes.

While populism relies on a framework of legitimacy that is provided by democracy itself, authoritarianism understood as 'accountability sabotage' contests democracy and includes violations of fundamental human rights (e.g. limiting healthcare) and freedoms (e.g. of religion). And although the subframes nationalism and nativism both start from the signifier 'the nation' or 'the native', nationalism does not automatically contrapose the native to the foreign, as does nativism, and define the own (the self) based on what is not one's own (the other). Instead, nationalism is best understood as being synonymous with patriotism, i.e., with strong affection for one's home country. We pointed out that while borders separate neighbouring nations, these nations also differ from each other with regard to their nature, their identity, i.e., their way of life, or ethos. Nativism is very pronounced in PRR politics, as our analysis of the VB manifesto illustrates, and boundary-making practices are the foundation not only of nativism, but also of PRR, more generally, whether literally, such as in separatism, or figuratively, such as in nationalism and authoritarianism. Although the implications of boundary-making politics are manifold, this article points especially to the dynamics in identity (re)formation and how each monist distinction "reinforces the idea that a general will exists" (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017: 16). That is, identifying a group on the basis of, or in contraposition to, a collective threat, reifies both threat and identity. Our findings warrant further academic attention to determine whether they can be extrapolated to other PRR parties and over different sources (such as social media).

Notes

- 1 Nations and natives are both products and producers of their nature. It both characterises them and also limits them: one nation's nature is distinct from another (nation's) nature. Borders and natures are very important in nationalism and nativism. They create order by separating neighbouring nations from each other and demarcating natives from strangers. Incidentally, the words originate from the same source (from the Latin 'nātiōnem', nātīvus and 'nātūra', which are all accusatives of '(g)nātiō', from '(g)nātus', past participle stem of the deponent verb '(g)nāsci', which means 'to be born, originate') and are used consistently in most European languages (in Dutch, 'nation' translates as 'natie'; in German, Danish, English and Swedish 'nation', and 'nasjon' in Norwegian).

- 2 Note that the governing party N-VA on different occasions uses this nationalist framing of the federal government as consisting, fundamentally, of 'two democracies' that run counter to one another (VB, 2019: 7). The N-VA is, like VB, a Flemish nationalist party but is far less exclusive and is distinguished from the VB nativism.
- 3 In Dutch, the word used is *vreemdeling*. We translate it as 'foreigner' even though *vreemdeling* (which literally means 'stranger' or 'alien') is more xenophobic.

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