KU LEUVEN

FACULTEIT SOCIALE
WETENSCHAPPEN

‘Stranger Danger!’

Mapping the (counter-)framing, perception of, and response strategies to migration and radicalisation in Belgium

Marie FIGOUREUX

Proefschrift aangeboden tot het verkrijgen van de graad van Doctor in de Sociale wetenschappen

Promotor: Prof. Dr. Baldwin Van Gorp

Onderzoekseenheid: Instituut voor Mediastudies

2021

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Van alles wat ik schreef
zijn dit het minste woorden.
En tel ze na, het zijn er
nog te veel: zelf hou ik van
mijn mond vol tanden,
het aaien van dit blad, de
woordenschat van mijn
twee handen, het stokken
van mijn adem als ik zeg
dat ik je hier niet kan
vertellen wie of wat je
voor me bent, omdat papier
me in de weg zit, en ik
het juiste woord niet ken.

Naar *Dit,* Bart Moeyaert, Verzamel de liefde (2006)

Abstract

Stranger danger, or the perception of the 'unknown other' as dangerous, contributes to the construction of in-groups versus out-groups within a polarising society. For years, the main 'other' in the West has been 'the Muslim'. The framing of this other as either a victim or an intruder through widespread media messages interacts with audience perceptions of minorities, resulting in a socially constructed reality. Narratives on Islam and Muslims are known to be predominantly negative and stereotypical. In the wake of a relentless War-on-Terror, othering dynamics are manifested in the handling of the sensitive and equally important topics migration and radicalisation, which are the focus of this dissertation. A securitised discourse fosters fear and creates a so-called suspect community, citizens perceived as dangerous based on their assumed religion, migration background or appearance. After a literature study on the mentioned themes, this dissertation formulates an answer to the resultant four research questions within a Belgian context. First, to uncover the (counter-)frames on migration and radicalisation beyond a polarising *Victim* versus *Intruder* dichotomy. Second, to incorporate how members of the suspect community perceive the dominant framing. Third, to develop a suitable methodology to facilitate research on similar sensitive topics. Fourth, to translate theoretical knowledge into a practical tool to respond to polarising issues. The ensuing dissertation is divided into three parts: Content, Perception and Applicability.

Part I on Content builds upon framing analysis to reconstruct the potential (counter-)frames on migration and radicalisation in Belgium. Chapter 2 disentangles the framing of migration in the Belgian press, uncovering the possibilities beyond a polarising, limiting *Victim* versus *Intruder* dichotomy. Moreover, the studies presented in this chapter link the framing of migration to key events in the migration-terrorism nexus, demonstrating the dynamic interaction between reality and perceived reality. Chapter 3 presents an overview of the (counter-)frames related to radicalisation, with several alternative perspectives (i.e., counter-frames) that deem to be obscured in public debate.

Part II on Perception comprises two mutually reinforcing chapters that emphasise the perception and experience of members of the suspect community with dominant discourses on

radicalisation. Chapter 4 reflects on the quest for a suitable methodology to facilitate research on sensitive topics and elaborately evaluates this methodology (i.e., cartoon elicitation) in this regard. Chapter 5 presents the analysis of conversations with members of the suspect community guided by cartoon elicitation. The focus of this chapter is twofold: (1) the presence of 'us and them' dynamics within the suspect community and (2) the experience with the dominant framing of radicalisation.

Part III on Applicability proposes a model of fight, flee and fuse approaches to encompass response strategies to polarising issues. Building upon theoretical insights of the previous chapters and additional studies, Chapter 6 contains a translation of theory into practice, guiding communication on polarising issues according to the stakeholder's goal: to fight (i.e., to fuel a debate), to flee (i.e., to ignore a debate), or to fuse (i.e., to depolarise a debate).

This dissertation concludes that narratives on migration and radicalisation proliferate *Stranger Danger*. The interaction of these depictions with audience perceptions results in a socially constructed reality of 'migrants' and 'radicalised' individuals. A community treated as suspect testifies of the harmful consequences of the problematization of radicalisation. Moreover, dynamics of *dual distancing,* the continuation of us-versus-them narratives within the community, occur simultaneously with signs of internalisation of stigmatising discourse. An eradication of *Stranger Danger* and working towards a truly inclusive society is in the interest of all.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

A history of colonialism, manifested in dehumanization (Fanon, 1963), has contributed to the *othering* of minorities in the West (Holck & Muhr, 2019). For centuries, the major 'other' for the West has been Muslims (Rane et al., 2014), shaping identities of a superior self versus a marginalised out-group (Brons, 2015; Chimakonam, 2020). Already in the eleventh century, an orientalist approach towards Islam created the East and West as opposites, where Islam became a symbol for terror, devastation and barbarism (Said, 1979). In a so-called decolonized society, myths of tolerance such as colour-blindness (Araújo, 2013) do not erase the impact of colonialism on current conceptions and narratives, present in the representation of Jews (Smith, 1996), Latin Americans (Cruz, 2002), black people (Dumas, 2013), Muslims (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017) or other minorities in Western countries.

Similarly in the current era, transformative *key events* define interactions between East, South and West, continuously shaping an othering framework. In response to 9/11, former U.S. president George W. Bush commenced a merciless War-on-Terror building on a "you're either with us, or against us" logic, which is a narrative of civilisation against barbarism (Lewandowsky et al., 2013). The War-on-Terror became a War Against Civilians (Badalič, 2019), gradually destabilizing the Middle Eastern region. Additionally, countries were left highly divided and in severe economic crisis, with famine and disease spreading (Filipec, 2020). The War-on-Terror not only transformed societies in the Arab world, but highly impacted daily life of Arabs in Western countries (Abraham et al., 2011) and encouraged a state of hypervigilance and restriction of civil liberties through media narratives (Brinson & Stohl, 2012; Frissen, 2019). It is then not terror itself, but rather the idea of terror that affects societies (Godefroidt, 2020).

Ten years after 9/11, in 2011, the revolutionary uprisings that are called 'the Arab Spring', said to have been sparked by the self-immolation by Mohammed Bouazizi in Sidi Bouzid (Tunisia), were not unanticipated nor surprising (Dabashi, 2012). The countries rose not only against unreformed Arab rule or youth unemployment, but protested against imposed neoliberal socioeconomic models (Bogaert, 2013; Della Porta et al., 2017). Neoliberal

restructuring forms the base of a mass movement demanding radical political change (Zemni, 2017). The rapid yielding in Tunisia inspired progressive communities in neighbouring countries to get organised, by use of social networks (Korotayev et al., 2018), mobile phones, internet and TV, which have the potential to destabilize a political regime (Bogaert, 2013). The importance of the use of social networks resulted in a labelling of the revolts as 'Facebook revolutions', 'YouTube uprisings' or 'Twitter uprisings' (e.g., El-Nawawy & Khamis, 2012; Imani Giglou et al., 2018; Khamis et al., 2012). In Syria, Libya and Yemen, the protests turned into ongoing civil wars and social violence.

The continued destabilization of the region, with regimes overturning or violently repressing social protests, and ongoing foreign interventions, led to two main consequences. Firstly, the ongoing wars forced people to flee their homes, while depriving economic circumstances caused others to search for better lives (Ahmed, 2020). Among other reasons, such as climate change (Piguet et al., 2011) or drug related violence (Contreras, 2014), this situation contributed to the so-called migration crisis, the largest surge in migration to Europe since the Second World War (Metcalfe-Hough, 2015). Othering processes are made explicit in a security focus on migration (Kaya, 2009), turning migrants into the new *wretched of the earth* (Fanon, 1963).

Secondly, the power vacuum has given opportunity to terrorist groups to organise and control growing areas in the region (Filipec, 2020). This resulted in the creation of a more powerful terrorist organization than al-Qaeda (Filipec, 2020), the transformation of 'al-Qaeda in Iraq' to Daesh (Islamic State) and terror waves across the world. Daesh's strategy partly focuses on recruiting Western Muslims (Zgryziewicz, 2016), convincing them to (a) move to Syria for 'Jihad' or (b) to destabilize the Western countries they live in, for example by planning terrorist attacks. This process has been labelled *radicalisation* and has sparked worries in Western societies for years. A new media ecology in these societies, spreading discourses on radicalisation facilitates discourses about radicalisation (Awan et al., 2011).

The 9/11 attacks were highly "mediated events" (Redfield, 2009, p. 2), and the same can be said for both migration and radicalisation. The current migration wave has been excessively reported (Rea et al., 2019), partly because the aspect of social media, where people on the move have the ability to share their travels live (d'Haenens et al., 2019). Migrants actively use this social media as channels of information to decide whether to migrate and where to settle (Dekker et al., 2018). Social media use among refugees is a tool to find

accessible information, overcome social isolation and learn about responsibilities of citizenship in the new country (Imani Giglou et al., foreseen 2021). The mediatisation of the so-called refugee crisis was largely based on exclusionary thinking (Krzyżanowski et al., 2018), focusing on nation-building.

At the same time, the media strategies of Daesh for recruitment and propaganda have been well-researched (Frissen, 2019; Pearson, 2018; Shaheen, 2015; Shamieh & Szenes, 2015; Windsor, 2020; Zgryziewicz, 2016). Even when the organization lost control over territory, online platforms such as Twitter, YouTube and Facebook were still used to communicate (Shamieh & Szenes, 2015). Going from Facebook revolutions to "digital jihad" (Younas, 2014, p. 1), there is a twofold aim of Daesh's communication: to religiously justify carried-out attacks, and to continue recruitment of new (foreign) fighters (Shamieh & Szenes, 2015). Strategic messaging in *Dabiq*, the organization's digital magazine (Gambhir, 2014), steps into a similar 'us vs. them' framing as applied by the United States, claiming that Western media are a threat to the Muslim unity (Zgryziewicz, 2016). As such, othering processes appear to be present in terrorist communication. At the same time, the labelling of the term 'terrorist' in Western countries has been found to enable othering as it is applied to Arab, Muslim, Asian, African or foreign-born executors of political violence, compared to the term 'extremists' preserved for white Christian perpetrators (Loadenthal, 2019).

In both the context of migration and radicalisation, narratives deem to play an important role. Within the radicalisation framework, these are not only actively used by terrorist organizations to foster so-called radicalisation (Kruglanski et al., 2019) but counter narratives are deployed to prevent radicalisation and stimulate de-radicalisation (Van Eerten et al., 2017). Societal narratives on radicalisation become all the more important in case of an ambiguous collective understanding, creating a *floating signifier* (Fadil et al., 2019; Schultz et al., 2020). Looking at migration, such narratives constitute policy making (Boswell et al., 2011), shaping an image of either dangerous intruders or powerless victims (Van Gorp, 2005).

This perception of issues by the audience is influenced by wide-spread messages (Potter, 2014). The spread of narratives on Muslims and Islam is increased through media, with a predominantly negative (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017) and increasingly extreme representation (D'Amato & Lucarelli, 2019). Not only do these representations contribute to negative attitudes towards Muslims (von Sikorski et al., 2017), media exposure on terrorism related content is linked to a state of hypervigilance, which was connected to *Islamoprejudice*, that is, people

avoiding contact with individuals from Arab descent (Frissen, 2019). This representation is enhanced by the *migration-terrorism-nexus* (Galantino, 2020), linking migration to terrorist events. Othering in narratives thus seems to affect in-group/out-group behaviour.

Scholars looking into the narratives on migration have illustrated a prevailing dichotomy: on the one hand the presentation of migrants as intruders, and on the other hand as victims (e.g., Awny, 2019; Bosilkov & Drakaki, 2018; Durán, 2013). Such opposition can be found in the representation of radicalisation as well: a threat versus marginalised individuals (Fangen & Kolås, 2016; Larsen, 2019). However, such representation fails to incorporate the complex realities of migration and radicalisation. A focus on problematizing views obscures potential alternative, deproblematizing perspectives. Moreover, this presentation is stereotypical and problematic since it presents simplified images of dangerous invaders or helpless pawns. Looking at for example the migration debate solely from this view limits the considered policy options, as there only seem two ways out of 'a crisis': closed or open borders. Scholars have aimed to broaden the debate and expanded the overview of narratives (e.g., Berbers et al., 2016; Ramasubramanian & Miles, 2018; Roggeband & Vliegenthart, 2007). However, these studies remain mainly issue-specific, focusing on dominant perspectives while presenting little insight in the reasoning behind a frame.

Besides a polarising dichotomy, scholars have pointed to the securitised discourse on migration (Kaya, 2009) and radicalisation (Fadil et al., 2019) within a general trend of *securitisation* (Vellenga & De Groot, 2019): presenting and perceiving an issue as an existential threat, moving it to the inside of the security realm (Buzan et al., 1998). This has led to the creation of a *suspect community* (Breen-Smyth, 2014), the treating of Muslim communities as a potential terrorist threat (Cherney & Murphy, 2016). In other words, *Stranger Danger,* a rooted distrust towards unknown individuals, enhances othering and societal divides. This labelling influences identity-building (Sigona, 2003), while narratives get settled in policies (Zetter, 1991), for example de-radicalisation programs focused on Muslim communities (Claes et al., 2020; Qurashi, 2018; Thomas, 2017).

1.1 Research aims

The first aim of this dissertation is to add to the knowledge of experience with (the feeling of) surveillance (Cherney & Murphy, 2016; de Koning, 2019; Ylitalo-James, 2020) **by learning more about experiences of the suspect community with dominant narratives.** As

the current literature mainly presents a limiting representation of reality, **the second aim of this dissertation is to go beyond this dichotomy by mapping the prevailing, alternative narratives on migration and radicalisation and matching these to key-events with regard to the migration-terrorism nexus.**

As research on sensitive topics poses multiple challenges such as distress, potential stigmatization and powerlessness (Adeloye et al., 2019; Elam & Fenton, 2003; Jansen & Davis, 1998), the search for a suitable methodology is essential. Photo-elicitation (Harper, 2002) has proven to be a valuable method as it triggers detailed, in-depth conversations with room for emotion and less hierarchy (Allen, 2011; Bagnoli, 2009; Clark-Ibáñez, 2004). It has thus often been used with less powerful groups in society (Rose, 2016). However, this method might limit conversations to what the visuals depict instead of having, in this case, a conversation on a general concept rather than a concrete example. **The third aim of this dissertation is to propose an enhanced method building upon photo elicitation that facilitates research on sensitive topics.**

The combination of othering mechanisms in the context of refugees and Muslims (Jones, 2017) and a focus on the in-group (Dunning & Harrison, 2010) strengthens 'us versus them' thinking (Choma et al., 2015). Migration and radicalisation are polarising issues that trigger social divide. Research has focused on potential counterstrategies to depolarise situations, such as the focus on correct information (Ahler & Sood, 2018; Kahan et al., 2015), emotion (Vasilopoulos et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2021) and (imagined) contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). These theoretical insights rarely present concrete tools on how to respond to polarising topics. **The fourth and final aim of this dissertation is to see how the insights from the performed research add to the literature on (de)polarisation, and how they contribute to practical knowledge on responding to polarising issues.**

1.2 Theoretical framework

According to cultivation theory, mass-produced messages shape meanings and beliefs of the public (Potter, 2014). It assumes the shaping of moral values due to long-term exposure to messages (Mosharafa, 2016). The world will then be seen through the presented lens, for example society might be perceived as more violent than it really is (Jamieson & Romer, 2017). Initially, cultivation analyses focused on the amount of consumed media. Melhem and Punyanunt-Carter (2019) built further on the theory, adding content-based measures to the

original scheme, arguing that not only *how much* media is consumed but also *what content* is consumed matters. What people think is then influenced by the media they consume (Ungerleider, 1991), and how they interact with it (Melhem & Punyanunt-Carter, 2019). Mass-media help shape reality by attaching importance to issues, known as agenda-setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Social reality thus gains meaning through media images (Gamson et al., 1992) and the interaction with others (Knoblauch, 2013).

1.2.1 Framing theory

Framing, defined by some scholars as second-level agenda-setting, incorporates *how* a message is formulated (McCombs, 2005). From a social constructionist perspective, frames can be understood as tools to systematize and give meaning to reality (Gamson & Modigliani, 1994). A representation of an objective reality through media influences how an audience perceives reality, and how they act in it (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). According to Reese (2001, p. 11) frames are "organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world". Each frame suggests a different definition, cause, consequence and solution to a problem (Entman, 1993) and as such, with each different perspective, the perception of the issue at hand changes. By highlighting certain aspects of reality, and giving less attention to others (Entman, 1993), public opinion on social and political issues can alter (Carter, 2013). The framing of issues thus impacts the perception of reality (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Put differently, language affects thoughts. For example, the association of the word 'Islam' with 'dangerous', 'terrorism', or other negative associations nourishes an islamophobic perception. Frames are culturally defined but in need of an active audience to make linkages, which is influenced by people's prior experiences (Van Gorp, 2010). Meaning is then created through the connection, via media coverage, of an issue to pre-existing mental constructs (Bugden et al., 2017). Thus, people do not passively accept what is presented to them but rather interact with these frames. From this social constructionist perspective, in interaction with framing, a reality is created and that reality predominates an 'objective' reality. Both radicalisation and migration express this process. It is unclear what the objective reality of radicalisation is, thus a constructed reality gains importance. A focus on Muslim communities from a security perspective results in repressive, alienating deradicalisation programs, creating a new social reality through interaction. In the context of migration, there is a physical action–people moving from one place to another–labelled migration; however, it becomes all determining so that people who have migrated, become

migrants, a label they cannot dismiss even if it is not them but their (grand)parents who migrated. The label migrant becomes decisive in a socially constructed identity.

From a constructionist perspective, elements such as the journalists personal, organizational and societal factors affect frame construction (Brüggemann, 2014). The journalists identity plays a role in frame construction (Berbers et al., 2016) as frames both influence how a journalist thinks and how (s)he reports (Brüggemann, 2014). An example is the environment in which they were raised, and which might foster stereotypes about Muslims or the Middle East in an Orientalist spirit (Luyendijk, 2010). Processes of othering influence the representation of refugees and Muslims (Jones, 2017), of which Islamophobia is an example (Ernst, 2013).

In response to dominant frames, *counter-framing* has been understood as a reactive strategy (e.g., Chong & Druckman, 2013; Squires, 2011), by reframing or deframing the presented frame (Vyncke & Van Gorp, 2020). Reframing refers to the presentation of an alternative viewpoint without referral to an opposing frame, while deframing is understood as refuting an opposing frame. In this dissertation, the term counter-frame is used as a categorisation based on problem definition. In this view, frames present problematizing definitions on an issue (e.g., "working longer is a problem because it is a physical and mental punishment", see Vyncke & Van Gorp, 2017) while counter-frames offer a deproblematizing perspective (e.g., "working longer is not a problem because society will benefit from the collective effort", see Vyncke & Van Gorp, 2017). The problematization of an issue is used to raise awareness (Van Gorp, 2010), however a balanced presentation of both frames and counter-frames can result in a more nuanced debate. The focus on alternative perspectives challenges the dominant viewpoints and broadens the conversation. Counter-framing allows for analysing an issue from different viewpoints, opening up to new definitions and consequentially new solutions. When it comes to polarising issues such as radicalisation and migration, a combination of frames and counter-frames can mitigate tension and facilitate constructive debate, one of the main aims of this dissertation.

1.2.2 Othering dynamics

Othering, understood as "the stratification of identities into in-group and out-group by the norm and the consequent marginalization of the out-group" (Chimakonam, 2020, p. 433) fuels from identity building based on group membership (Tajfel, 1974). It is "a simultaneous construction of the self, or in-group, and the other, or out-group in mutual and unequal opposition through

identification of some desirable characteristic that the self/in-group has and the other/out-group lacks and/or some undesirable characteristic that the other/out-group has and the self/in-group lacks" (Brons, 2015, p. 70). By creating an 'other', the order and unity of the in-group can be confirmed (van Houtum & Van Naerssen, 2002), as the construction of self is tied to the outside, to creating and confirming borders (van Houtum, 2021). As Hall (1996a, p. 345) states, "only when there is 'an other' can you know who you are", as the self refers to the ways in which one sees oneself, which is adaptable to different social categories (Stets & Burke, 2000). For example: a religious person seeing atheists as amoral and thus inferior; or the Orientalist othering of the rational, thus superior West, presented as male, versus the emotional, thus inferior, East, represented as female (Brons, 2015). Othering thus not only creates an identity for the out-group, but also shapes an identity of the in-group: 'we are not them'.

A strong focus on in-group identity strengthens intergroup divisions (Gaertner et al., 1993), as opposing to an out-group creates positive feelings for the in-group and negative feelings for the out-group (Billig & Tajfel, 1973) as well as differentiates levels of trust (Westwood et al., 2018). As such, groups share a "common foe" (King & Anderson, 1971). According to Wojcieszak and Garrett (2018), such focus on national identity – in-group solidarity – can stimulate negative feelings towards undocumented immigrants – the out-group. Such processes create a *marginalised other*: the construction of a negative identity that can result in social exclusion and discriminatory policies (Brons, 2015; Chimakonam, 2020). A categorisation and marginalization, for example the creation of people without documents (the Sans-Papiers), leads to a different valuation of human lives (van Houtum & Boedeltje, 2009). In Danish society, labelling of non-Western immigrants led to listing 'ghetto' areas, where 'integration' policies apply (Zhang, 2020). In the case of radicalisation, it leads to the creation of a suspect community (Breen-Smyth, 2014) living under surveillance and suspicion. Research has focused on these processes of othering and the creation of the out-group; however, the question is raised how these dynamics affect people of targeted communities.

Solidarity is shared with people that share the same social identity, while the out-group is seen as more distant (Dunning & Harrison, 2010). The out-group can react to this identity-building by reconstructing their identity (*re-othering*) (Chimakonam, 2020). It is through self-categorisation, naming oneself in relation to social categories and belonging to social groups, that an identity is formed (Stets & Burke, 2000). This self-categorisation implies comparing in- and out-groups. Re-othering assumes that majority groups in society have power over the identity construction of others (to which they can react) but also that identity is created in

relation to another (Jensen, 2011). In the context of migration and radicalisation, a community is homogeneously presented as 'the other' (Demarest et al., 2020), describing Arabs and Muslims as 'culturally different' (Benveniste et al., 2017; Rich & Troudi, 2006). The presentation of large groups as monolithic (e.g., migrants, Muslims) neglects the inner diversity (Thomas-Olalde & Velho, 2011). This means that in the case of migration, the majority group will label newcomers, and their children, as 'migrants' or 'refugees' and continue to treat them as such with no attention for internal differences. Moreover, it is an external identity allocated to minority groups. A similar process arises with young individuals of suspect communities, who are labelled as 'radicalised' and even as potential terrorists, and will be treated based upon this label.

Identity building of a minoritized other

Considering that a personal social identity results from the social relations (van Houtum & Lagendijk, 2001), what happens when these social relations are embedded in othering? This is especially relevant in the case of migrants, who live through a transformation of their identity and home (van Houtum & Van Naerssen, 2002). Research has shown a difference in how non-Muslims see Muslim communities, and how these communities see themselves (Imani Giglou et al., 2019). The internalisation of orientalist othering results in a categorisation of migrants as out-group and hinders integration (Rashid & Cepeda-García, 2021). The othering takes place for example by use of terms as 'terrorists' for one group, and 'extremists' for another (Dunn et al., 2005; Loadenthal, 2019) and by practical orientalism such as legislation about dress, daily comments and acts that continuously reaffirm an 'us' and 'them' (Haldrup et al., 2016). Such subtle othering and microagressions impact physical, emotional and psychological health (Devadoss, 2020), processes that are continued in an online environment (Harmer & Lumsden, 2019).

From an established-outsider approach, van Campenhout and van Houtum (2020) discuss the dynamics of national belonging. Essers and Tedmanson (2014) built upon conversations with Turkish women in The Netherlands to show how they use ethnicity to respond to othering. The women describe an in-between identity: not belonging to Dutch nor Turkish society, while others experience this as a transnational identity: picking the best of both worlds. Another strategy is to minimalize their Turkish decent and focus on how they are practically Dutch. This in-between identity is elaborately studied by Cohen and Kassan (2018), mapping the identity building of young immigrants. Jensen (2011) identifies both a capitalizing on othering, as well as a refusal of it by demanding humanization. Literat (2017) looked into

this self-representation by analysing selfies taken by refugees. Already the possession of a smartphone has been met with scepticism, as refugees are supposed to be poor, and thus these people could not be 'real refugees' but rather 'economic migrants' (Literat, 2017), neglecting the need for communication, GPS or networking in a new country. Literat sees these selfies, which basically are a source of empowerment, in later stage being turned into memes by anti-refugee groups, reinforcing othering.

Othering made explicit in the representation of minorities in media

Research on the representation of Islam and Muslims indicates a polarised perspective of East versus West, with depictions of dangerous, violent men as terrorists (Akbarzadeh & Smith, 2005; Melhem & Punyanunt-Carter, 2019; Scanlan, 2010). The negative representation of migrants contributes to a public othering (Breen et al., 2006). Specifically Muslim 'brown' men have been presented as representative to the Muslim community (Powell, 2011), and Muslim females as passive and oppressed (Akbarzadeh & Smith, 2005; Melhem & Punyanunt-Carter, 2019).

Especially since 9/11, representation of Muslims has been linked to terrorism and criminality (Rane et al., 2014). Silva (2017) sees the othering of Muslims represented in the radicalisation discourse; an analysis of news media and policy documents indicates a shift towards Islam, with narratives that depict Muslims as so-called alien others to the West. Looking at the representation of refugees, othering is reflected in the use of negative words and stereotypical images, presenting a collective and anonymous picture leaving little room for personal identification (Van Haelter & Joye, 2020). In earlier research, Saeed (2007) stressed the focus on 'un-Britishness' and 'deviance' when reporting on British Muslims.

Research indicates a silencing of minorities voices (Schradie, 2011; Yi & Jung, 2015). The concerned group, for example refugees, are rarely given opportunity to speak (De Cock et al., 2018), while they can mostly only act in reaction to a narrative rather than construct their own (Leurs et al., 2018). Bleich and colleagues (2015) stress the potential of media in empowering minorities and giving them voice, countering stereotypical narratives. In their interpretation, media platforms form an equal level playing field and offer no additional obstacles to minorities to participate. Silverstone (2001) questions the capabilities of minorities to participate in the 'common space' media. While most research focuses on (the lack of) voice of minorities in media, Dreher (2009) calls attention to listening, changing the focus from the silenced voices to the institutions and systems who regulate which voices should be heard. The

challenge is then not to have voice, but to be heard (Dreher, 2010). Not only media, but also refugee organizations have been found to use dehumanizing representations, creating little space for displaced people to be heard (Ongenaert & Joye, 2019). This representation of refugees as helpless constructs an image of the 'Western Self' as solidary (Chouliaraki, 2012). Minorities, such as refugees but also members of the suspect community, are overrepresented in media at topic peak moments, however they are rarely given voice. This dissertation focuses on the experiences of a community that is overrepresented in media on certain topics however excluded from being heard nor considered as the audience of these media messages, defined here as a *silenced overrepresented minority*. In this case, dominant narratives are discussed with members of the *suspect community*. The individuals are thus not perceived as victims, but regarded by society as a threat.

1.3 A securitised dichotomy in the perception of 'migration' and 'radicalisation'

Migration and radicalisation are two complex concepts of which both the definitions and real-life events are entangled. Research has focused on the link made between migration and terrorism (Huysmans, 2000), also known as *the migration-terrorism nexus* (Galantino, 2020) impacted by key events. While migration and radicalisation are widespread as a concept, both lack consensus definitions and risk becoming floating signifiers (Schultz et al., 2020). A securitised discourse enhances the creation of a suspect community (Breen-Smyth, 2014) which might create a self-fulfilling prophecy (Cherney, 2016): labelling individuals as radicalised may result in alienation and a process labelled radicalisation. Combined with a polarising dichotomy in representation, these aspects result in the first and second research aim, as formulated before, that is, to go beyond an opposition of perspectives and introduce nuance, while learning more about the experiences of the targeted community with dominant narratives.

1.3.1 In search for definitions

Migration: an umbrella term

In 2016, one in seven people were on the move (International Organization for Migration, 2016). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) sees the term 'migrant' as an umbrella term for people leaving their residence (inter)nationally for several reasons, for example students, migrant workers or refugees (International Organization for Migration, 2019). The term migrant should thus be seen as a broader concept under which refugees can be

categorised. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines it otherwise and distinguishes between migrants and refugees, where the first are seen as on the move for a better life, and the latter as "any person forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence" (UNHCR, 2021b). People on the move include vulnerable minorities, such as disabled people, pregnant women and minors (Puschmann et al., 2019). UNHCR defines the migration movements witnessed around 2015 as mixed movements (or mixed migration):

> "[T]he flows of people travelling together, generally in an irregular manner, over the same routes and using the same means of transport, but for different reasons. The men, women and children travelling in this manner often have either been forced from their homes by armed conflict or persecution, or are on the move in search of a better life." (UNHCR, 2021a)

The term 'migrant' refers to a collective identity (McAreavey, 2017). This labelling process has become political, as it is used in discourses opposing newcomers arrival (Zetter, 2007). A label of 'migrant' or 'refugee' carries assumptions, such as 'hard-working' (hence exploitable) or 'less deserving' (McAreavey, 2017). These ideas about identity are formalized in bureaucracy (Zetter, 1991). This is no innocent step, as outsiders labels help shape the identity of the concerned group: defining people as nomads and adjusting policy to the community as such, creates nomads (Sigona, 2003) which can result in a self-labelling (Hatoss, 2012). In a similar way, if one settles in a country and loses the refugee label, children can still be seen as second-generation migrants (Somerville, 2008), or even third- (Mannitz, 2005) or fourth-generation.

This drawing of borders and categorisation of people on the move indicates a need for control and overview: the question is not only how many people should be allowed in a country, but also which migrants are welcomed (d'Haenens & Joris, 2019). The difference made between wanted and unwanted immigrants (Mügge & van der Haar, 2016) or deserving and undeserving migrants (Dhaliwal & Forkert, 2015) is in line with the categories of 'refugee' and 'economic migrant' (Rea et al., 2019). This has implications for the adopted policies (e.g., the requirement of integration) and the problematization of migration (Mügge & van der Haar, 2016). The perspectives on migration and migrants deem to interplay with applied policy (Boswell et al., 2011). A normalization of extreme anti-immigrant narratives in newspapers (D'Amato & Lucarelli, 2019) supports a strong deterrence-oriented policy (Steinhilper & Gruijters, 2018). Hurdles within policy reflect this preference of certain migrants over others. For example, visa for legal travel come at a high cost, which does not stop people from

migrating, it forces them to do so in unsafe ways (for example, depending on human traffickers which are paid through prostitution). Asylum can only be applied to from within the country, requiring to travelling without guarantee of safety. Other examples are costly payments for family reunifications, making it nearly impossible for children to reunite with their family members, or paid integration tracks. Such policy facilitates attracting the *right* people in the eyes of government, instead of, for example, applying policy based on needs.

The radicalisation cluster

While the concept of migration is largely clear of what it refers to, radicalisation remains a rather obscure and ill-defined concept. The 'catch-all concept' (Coolsaet, 2016a) became widespread in Europe following the attacks in Madrid in 2004 by so-called home-grown terrorists (Hörnqvist & Flyghed, 2012). Some scholars categorise violent and non-violent radicalisation (Bartlet & Miller, 2012), indicating a divergence between either behavioural or attitudinal radicalisation. Then "radicalisation of attitudes need not result in radicalisation of behaviour" (Moghaddam, 2009, p. 280). Another distinction is made between a focus on the individual level (e.g., Koehler, 2014) or the group level (e.g., Smith et al., 2020). The complexity of the concept is captured in the definition of Della Porta (2018b, p. 460): "A process of escalation from nonviolent to increasingly violent repertoires of action that develops through a complex set of interactions unfolding over time". Radicalisation has a relative sense, as it is defined by what is seen as moderate (Sedgwick, 2010) and appears to be a pre-stage to violence: "a process of gradually subscribing to a violent ideology espousing terrorism" (Rahimullah et al., 2013, p. 1). Definitions of radicalisation in a policy context amplify a security approach to the concept, for example "extreme views, including beliefs that violent measures need to be taken", by the U.S. Department of Justice. Such interpretations of radicalisation are far-reaching as they incorporate personal beliefs and opinions, which raises the question of how to control those.

Although to the date, there is no clear definition of what radicalisation is, there seems to be consensus on the concept of radicalisation as a *process.* For example, Moghaddam identified radicalisation as a 'staircase to terrorism' (2005), while Feddes and colleagues (2016) indicated four phases to radicalisation and McCauley and Moskalenko (2014) proposed a two-pyramids model, for opinion-radicalisation and action-radicalisation. The first moves from neutral, sympathizers, justifiers to finally personal moral obligation. The latter steps from inert to activists, radicals and ultimately terrorists. Other scholars find linear approaches an oversimplification of reality, and suggest a puzzle with different pieces (grievances, networks,

ideologies and a supporting social environment) to represent the radicalisation process (Hafez & Mullins, 2015). Schmid (2013) indicates eight factors that are more or less agreed upon despite a lacking definition: there is no pathological cause for radicalisation, no single profile of a terrorist, radicalisation is a process on which de-radicalisation has limited effects, structural issues as unemployment and social networks play a role, as grievances who work as mobiliser and ideology is more of an explanation afterwards than a true stimulant of radicalisation. The ambiguity of the concept results in unfounded deradicalisation programs, the impossibility to measure radicalisation, and a strong focus on Islam (Coolsaet, 2019).

A floating or empty signifier

Due to a lack of consensus definition, Sedgwick (2010) argues to abandon the concept of radicalisation entirely since it is being used in different contexts (security, foreign policy and integration) where it means different things and thus being a source of confusion rather than an explanatory factor in a complex process. It can be considered a floating signifier, a term that appears self-evident, however is "lacking a clear or stable referent" (Schultz et al., 2020, p. 4) as it can be interpreted in multiple ways. The term, originally coined by Lévi-Strauss, is said to be a semantic function, "whose role is to enable symbolic thinking to operate despite the contradiction inherent in it" (Lévi-Strauss, 1987, p. 63). When examined closely, "their precise meaning proves elusive or contradictory" (Schultz et al., 2020, p. 4). These are concepts that are everywhere, yet nowhere (Littlewood & Reynolds, 2020). For Chandler (2013, p. 52), the floating signifier "may mean whatever their interpreters want them to mean". Stuart Hall (1997) has identified race as a floating signifier. He argues that race helps categorizing individuals, linking for example intelligence to skin colour, without scientific evidence for such claims.

Laclau (2005) has categorised empty and floating signifiers. Applied to radicalisation, a concept appearing everywhere–news media, policy, research funding–while remaining ambiguous and vague, Fadil et al. (2019) refer to it as an empty signifier. There is then no more link between the signifier and the signified (Laclau, 2005). For example, radicalisation aims to represent a diversity of meanings, and thus renounces one clear definition (Moraes, 2014), incorporating contradictory interpretations under one overarching term (Laclau, 2005). In case of a floating signifier, the concept has alternating meanings with a changing context (Laclau, 2005) thus the content is ambiguous, but not empty, as referred to by Schultz et al. (2020).

There are potential consequences of an open-to-personal-interpretation concept (Fadil et al., 2019; Schultz et al., 2020). Schultz et al. (2020) focused on the perceptions of correctional officers of radicalisation and saw that the interpretation of the concept influenced how the officers thought and behaved towards prisoners. Wider frames on religion and race, gangs and mental illness influenced the meanings attributed to radicalisation, working as points of reference for the prison officers. Lacking a standardized definition, they relied on representation through media and these related frames. Fadil et al. (2019) add the aspect of Islamization as the concept absorbed a problematization of Islam, and the amount in which the term is present in media and political discourse. Thus, the ambiguity of the concept of radicalisation leads to an audience interpreting it based on media messages and frames. As the issue is so all consuming yet remains so vague, the following segment investigates what narratives on radicalisation are prevailing, shaping the social construction of radicalisation in audiences' minds and behaviour.

1.3.2 Narratives on migration and radicalisation

Migration has been a popular topic among framing scholars. This has been less the case for radicalisation; however, a vast amount of research has identified perspectives on terrorism. In both cases, the representation of the concept in essence rely on a dichotomy of positive versus negative: victims versus intruders in migration research, and freedom fighters versus terrorists in terrorism and radicalisation research.

Positive and negative framing of migration and radicalisation

Looking at migration, in many research, 'refugees' and 'migrants' are viewed as interchangeable terms, considering these labels are used in this way in public discourse. For example, Roggeband and Vliegenthart (2007) reconstructed five frames on migration: a victim perspective (refugees as intruders), a multicultural frame (a celebration of diversity), an emancipation frame (a need for education of refugees) and a restriction frame (an economic exploit by refugees). Ramasubramanian and Miles (2018) indicated four different frames: the war frame (calling attention for violence in home countries), the institutional frame (the responsibility of institutions in the migration policy), the borders frame (responsibility of neighbouring countries) and the victim frame. Douai and colleagues (2021) find Syrian refugees to be framed as security threats in the United States, with attention to the administrative costs they bring along. D'Amato and Lucarelli (2019) add the Westphalian narrative, which focuses on the in-group and thus demands a strong security policy towards the out-group. In Flanders, Cleen and colleagues (2017) categorise three main themes: a culturalist

logic, an economic logic and a securitarian logic. A culturalist logic distinguishes based on race or religion, problematizing ethnic-cultural diversity. An economic logic is employer-centred, for example looking at active labour migration as well as economic problematization of migrants as profiteers of the welfare state. A securitarian logic argues newcomers to be dangerous, indulging in crime and linked to terrorism. They see a continuation of the presentation of immigrants as a cultural threat to national and European identity, and an amplified securitarian narrative in light of the terrorist attacks.

In the representation of radicalisation, we can see an entanglement of the concepts extremism and terrorism. In the reconstruction of the frame-building of Belgian Syria fighters, Boesman and colleagues (2017) showed that this framing relates to the framing of related topics, such as 9/11, framing the individuals as terrorists or victims. This framing adds to the newsworthiness of the article, perhaps more than the facts (Boesman et al., 2017). As indicated by research by Berbers and colleagues (2016), the framing of concepts such as radicalisation, terrorism and extremism are bound together with the representation of Muslims (Campbell, 2017). According to Bhatia (2008, p. 218), terrorism "is associated with barbarism, evil and a lack of freedom", which on its turn is associated with Islam (Powell, 2011; Yusof et al., 2013). Perpetrators of terrorist acts were also quickly and repeatedly identified as 'Muslim', affirming the stereotype that terrorists are Muslim (Powell, 2011).

Often, research focuses on a specific case to investigate terrorism framing (Ette, 2012; Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2008) and news outlets are found to apply more episodic (describing concrete events) than thematic (contextualizing events) frames (Abdullah & Elareshi, 2015). An often presented dichotomy is the image of the freedom fighter versus the terrorist (e.g., el-Nawawy, 2004; Montiel & Shah, 2008). Scholars have found a difference in representation of foreign terrorists compared to home-grown terrorists (Powell, 2011) and a strong focus on 'us versus them' narratives (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2008). As such, a difference is found in the representation of 9/11 in the Arabic-language newspaper *Al-Hayat* and the English-language newspaper the *International Herald Tribune* (Fahmy, 2010). The first focuses on the material rather than human cost of 9/11, and calls attention for the victims of the Afghan war, while the second newspaper applies a humanitarian lens to report on 9/11 and a pro-war perspective to discuss the Afghan war.

In 2011, Awan and colleagues investigated discourses on radicalisation in the context of Jihadist culture and al-Qaeda arguments, as well as British representation of the 'radicalised'

(Awan et al., 2011). Berbers et al. (2016) investigated the framing of 'Syria fighters' (a frame in itself) in Flanders and the Netherlands. A Syria fighter here is viewed as a radicalised Muslim, and Berbers et al. reconstructed five frames: the terrorist frame (radicalised Muslims are viewed as disloyal to the state); the victim frame (the Syria fighter is manipulated); the adventurer frame (a naïve undertaking to find tension); the Don Quixote frame (a hero to save Syrian citizens) and the martyr frame (fulfilling a religious duty). This research is hence focused on a violent understanding of Muslim-radicalisation. Similarly, Larsen (2019) analysed Norwegian news reporting on so-called foreign fighters and saw, on the one hand, a representation of radicalised individuals as criminals and a threat, and on the other hand as a marginalised group of human beings rather than dehumanised terrorists. Earlier research indicated similar results, however focused on 'Syria travellers' rather than 'Syria fighters' (Fangen & Kolås, 2016).

Looking at framing over a longer period of time, a longitudinal analysis by Beckers and Van Aelst (2019) shows a change in narrative in Flanders during the so-called crisis, where commercial broadcasting makes use of a criminal perspective and public broadcasting includes more voices of citizens and immigrants. By matching frames to the *issue attention cycle* – the changes in attention a topic receives from the public (Downs, 1991) – it deems that frames are not constant but change in correlation with important events (Shih et al., 2008). Adopted to terrorism and policy, Hall (2002) expects severe security measures to receive less political support when there is less attention by the public for a potential threat. As such, this issue attention cycle interacts with policy. Key events interact with this issue attention cycle and, as described earlier, have been an important factor in the othering of minority groups. For example, 9/11 affected the representation of Muslims, which consequentially influenced public's behaviour. Brosius and Eps (1995) looked at news selection of asylum seekers in relation to key events, and identified an interaction between both. According to the authors, framing deems to be dynamic, and in some relation to key-events, understood as events that are highly covered and that shape following coverage (Brosius & Eps, 1995). However, Czymara and Van Klingeren (2021) studied the news media reporting during the 'migration crisis' in Germany with regard to key events, and find no relation between both. Literature is thus conflicted upon the relationship (if there is one) between key events and the dynamic of framing. The entanglement of key events, the representation of minorities and framing dynamics leads to a need for clarification. This dissertation seeks to sharpen this insight by matching the coverage of migration to key events, clarifying the framing attention cycle.

Going beyond a polarised dichotomy

The presentation of migrants as victims or intruders (e.g., Awny, 2019; Bosilkov & Drakaki, 2018; Haw, 2021; Mazzara et al., 2020) or radicalised individuals as a threat or as victims (Larsen, 2019), insufficiently describes reality, obscuring the complexity of the issues. Through a social construction of reality, an audience perceives and subsequently acts according to the presented perspectives. Through representations, and societal interactions with them, representations become reality. The presentation of reality through a victim-intruder lens *problematizes* radicalisation and migration, which might be an active choice in aiming to raise awareness. For example, by presenting refugees as victims, awareness is raised for situations in home countries as well as hurdles faced when arriving in host countries. However, such opposition neglects potential deproblematizing views that touch upon alternative aspects of reality.

Additionally, the representation is stereotypical and thus problematic as it describes individuals as either dangerous and threatening or helpless and depriving of agency. Such polarising view limits the debate to the presented solutions to the issue and neglects alternative insights. Within this dichotomy, two options are presented: a repressive securitised approach, for example closed borders and surveillance, opposed to a sheltering of passive individuals, discarded of any responsibility, for example by open borders, an opposition questioned in audience perception research by Haw (2021). By opening up this opposition, alternative policies can be considered; moreover, it gives room to explore different positions in the debate and balance arguments.

Scholars have formulated broader typologies on migration and radicalisation (Berbers et al., 2016; Ramasubramanian & Miles, 2018; Roggeband & Vliegenthart, 2007) of which the opposing perspectives were part. This dissertation wants to go beyond this categorisation for two reasons. First, the perspectives on migration are mainly issue-specific frames, thus frames that are specific to one issue, that centre on ‘migration’ as a theme. By adhering to a more generic approach, the frames rely on deeper values in society and can be applied to different issues. This means that the frames are not solely applicable to for example migration, but to different topics. For example, the victim perspective is a more generic frame as it is broadly applicable. Not only does it capture viewpoints on refugees and migrants, it can also be applied to how society views the elderly. It relates to shared cultural values and is thus transcending of specific issues. Second, the presented frames on migration only present little insight in the reasoning behind a frame. Reflection on the respective causes, consequences, solutions and

framing devices supporting a frame gives a more detailed understanding of a perspective. Such understanding enables more insight in the reasoning of opposed groups, and can support a more constructive debate. The combination of the insufficient dichotomy in framing literature on migration and radicalisation with the risk of concepts becoming floating signifiers, and the potential importance of key events on news representation of minorities, results in the first research question:

RQ1: How can the framing on migration and radicalisation go beyond a polarising dichotomy in relation to key events?

1.3.3 A securitised discourse

Key events such as the 9/11 attacks placed a new lens on Islam: the perception of terror (Melhem & Punyanunt-Carter, 2019; Powell, 2011; Scanlan, 2010). A general trend of securitisation rises (Vellenga & De Groot, 2019), namely the description and perception of an outsider as an existential threat, transforming an issue to a security concern (Buzan et al., 1998). The normalization of preventive measures (Bigo, 2019) not only influenced counterterrorism (Cherney & Murphy, 2016) but also how radicalisation (Fadil et al., 2019) and migration (Huysmans, 2006; Kaya, 2009) policies have been constructed. Muslims in Western European countries have been subject to surveillance and legislation based on their religious beliefs (e.g., a hijab ban) as they are seen as a threat to security (Edmunds, 2012). Specifically, Muslim men have been presented as a cultural problem, while the Muslim women needed to be liberated from misogynists (De Cleen et al., 2017).

Radicalisation in this case is interpreted as an extensive involvement with religion (Goerzig & Al-Hashimi, 2015). In these interpretations, radicalisation is seen as a virus of religious ideas spreading around friends (Kundnani, 2012). Radicalisation exists in interaction with hyper security (Awan et al., 2011; Bramadat & Dawson, 2014). (De-)Radicalisation policies flourished, incorporating several actors such as social workers, religious leaders, youth leaders and police officers, with a focus on Islam (Fadil et al., 2019). The strong focus on Islam resulted in an 'Islamization of security', a dual process where any discussion about Islam is concerned with threat and at the same time, any discussion about security is concerned with Islam, which leads to the categorisation of good and bad Muslims (Fadil et al., 2019; Omelicheva, 2011). Groeninck (2019) has focused on how a dominant security discourse that divides in acceptable and un-acceptable Islam seeps through in the Islamic community and how it fosters discussion on Islamic teaching and understanding. Building upon ethnographic

fieldwork with Islamic leaders in Brussels in 2013 and the developments after the Paris (2015) and Brussels (2016) attacks, the author perceives a divide in the community on how to solve the problem of radicalisation. Although all condemn the discourse of Islam being an inherent cause, some redirect this vision towards Salafism (i.e., an interpretation of Islam) and see a so-called correct practice of religion as helpful. Others interpret radicalisation as an ignorance of the Islamic tradition. The securitisation of radicalisation becomes tangible in the consequences: young people testify of losing their jobs at the airport or being unable to travel to certain countries because they are placed on a security list due to, for example, a Facebook friend who left for Syria.

The securitisation of migration is reflected in policies and reasoning on causes and consequences of migration and counteractions. In the current climate, helping refugees and migrants is seen as counterproductive as it is said to create a 'pull-effect', attracting more refugees (Deboosere & Majdoub, 2021) while borders are secured with wire, barriers and armed controls (Bartoszewicz, 2016). Less visible borders are the paper walls: categorizing in desired and undesired travellers (van Houtum, 2021). Kaya (2009) adds linguistic securitisation to this overview by calling attention for dehumanizing racist and xenophobic word use (e.g., 'intrusion', 'invasion', 'flood'). The creation of the EU as gated community results from this fear and exclusion of others (van Houtum & Pijpers, 2007). This fear is not only connected to violence, but also to the import of diseases. For example, during the COVID19 pandemic, refugees were perceived as a health threat. According to Buonfino (2004), this securitisation is based on a fear of losing identity and thus the *other* is seen as a potential risk, resulting in a condemnation of people to an existence as immigrant with no name (van Houtum & Boedeltje, 2009). The (in)security is two-sided: a guaranteeing of the social, economic and state security EU inhabitants, as well as the human security of migrants (Lazaridis, 2011). The securitisation of migration and radicalisation is strengthened through the *migration-terrorism nexus*, and results in the creation of a *suspect community*, two aspects discussed hereafter.

The migration-terrorism nexus

Following the Arab Spring, Pinyol-Jiménez (2012) identified the *migration-security nexus*, the increasing treatment of migration as a security threat. Later on, this framework was strengthened through the simultaneous key events of terrorist attacks on European soil with the arrival of refugees to the continent; supporting the idea of migrants as a threat and creating a *migration-terrorism nexus* (Galantino, 2020). Fadil et al. (2019) see the early conceptualisation of radicalisation as an aim to link a failing integration of migrants to a growing security threat,

a reasoning that fits within the framework of a migration-terrorism nexus. This focus is supported by the reasoning that "immigration and terrorism are linked; not because all immigrants are terrorists, but because all, or nearly all, terrorists in the West have been immigrants" (Leiken, 2004, p. 6). Such reasoning raises questions of who is considered a migrant and who is not – as with the attacks in Paris in 2015 and Brussels 2016, certain perpetrators were Belgian citizens, however, they were not viewed nor represented (solely) as such but rather as immigrants. In Belgian terrorist court cases, convicts risk losing their Belgian nationality in case where they had double nationality, strengthening the narrative that 'they do not belong to us'. For example, Fouad Belkacem was convicted in 2015 for his participation in Sharia4Belgium, in 2018 he lost his Belgian nationality retaining solely his Moroccan one (Decré, 2018).

Through newspaper analysis, Galantino (2020) indicates a convergence between the discourses on terrorism and migration as the causes for terrorist attacks are found in recent migration. The perpetrators of the Paris attacks in 2015 were initially believed to have travelled as refugees and thus trespassed the European borders, which increased fear towards migration (Beckers & Van Aelst, 2019). An extensive analyses of immigration and terrorist attacks in 145 countries brings nuance in the discussion (Bove & Böhmelt, 2016). They conclude that migration *an sich* does not lead to more terrorist attacks; moreover, more migration is associated with less terrorism. According to their research, only a minority of immigrants can be linked to terror attacks. These results question the discourse of terrorists as migrants, and migrants as terrorists and the difference between perspective and reality.

Construction of a 'suspect community'

A securitised perspective on migration and radicalisation, combined with processes of othering, have led to the creation of a *suspect community* (Breen-Smyth, 2014). This community should be understood as:

> "a sub-group of the population that is singled out for state attention as being 'problematic'. Specifically in terms of policing, individuals may be targeted, not necessarily as a result of suspected wrong doing, but simply because of their presumed membership to that sub-group. Race, ethnicity, religion, class, gender, language, accent, dress, political ideology or any combination of these factors may serve to delineate the sub-group" (Pantazis & Pemberton, 2009, p. 649).

Specifically, Muslims (be it citizens or newly arriving migrants) have become a stigmatised minority that are perceived as a potential terrorist threat (Cherney & Murphy, 2016). Furthermore, counterterrorism and deradicalisation policies have contributed to the

stigmatization of Muslim communities (Awan, 2012). For example, the Prevent policy in the UK has contributed to the surveying of the Muslim community (Qurashi, 2018). The transformation of a social group into a security threat legitimizes extreme policies (Edmunds, 2012), a securitised discourse that changes the experiences of education, activism and identity (Brown & Saeed, 2015). The creation of such suspect community is not only based upon state policies, but continued by media and society in general (Breen-Smyth, 2014) and conflict such as terrorist attacks (Ylitalo-James, 2020).

The securitisation discourse affects policy and might be counterproductive. In the case of migration, and the connection made between migration and terrorism, it is deemed counterproductive in *managing* a migration crisis: imposing conditions before providing aid to countries can contribute to the radicalisation of a population – the exact threat European countries fear and are trying to contain (Dover, 2008). In the same way, measures that focus on repressing Islam can be a factor in a radicalisation process (Lenz-Raymann, 2014). Stigmatization, such as on overresponse to non-threatening behaviour (e.g., the words 'Allahu Akbar' [God is great]), can potentially lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy (Cherney, 2016). By negatively labelling someone, they can identify with that label, perceiving themselves from the stigma of potential extremists. It is also possible that individuals revolt against a label, which society then identifies as 'radicalisation', leading to more repressive actions and continuing a negative spiral. Moreover, deradicalisation policies might undermine the trust relationship between young people and youth workers, needing guaranteed safe spaces to discuss sensitive topics (Van Bouchaute et al., 2019).

The experience with labelling and dominant narratives on minorities has been the subject of scholarly research. For example, Trebbe and Schoenhagen (2011) organised group discussions with people who have migrated and Swiss citizens to learn more about their experiences with the representation of migration on Swiss television. They address the passive role handed to migrants, an overrepresentation of problematized situations and at the same time an underrepresentation of deproblematized situations of migrants. From a similar approach, d'Haenens et al. (2000) have discussed the media experience of ethnic minorities in The Netherlands, in which the participants claimed not to recognize themselves. Participants stress an overrepresentation of negative experiences with ethnic minorities and a focus on ethnic background when it is not necessary (e.g., reporting criminal events). A small group has been found to actively counter stigmatising discourses by communicating online and with mainstream media (Yi & Jung, 2015). However, in the case of suspect communities, the

securitised discourse and aspect of surveillance form an added layer to the stigma. In the case of radicalisation, young people are treated as potential terrorists. Another segment of literature, looking at minority experiences with such constructs, focuses on this suspect community. The majority of research on the suspect community focuses on the United Kingdom, where the case of the IRA was later translated to the Muslim community (e.g., Awan, 2012; Hickman et al., 2012; Minhas, 2018). Van Meeteren and van Oostendorp (2019) confirmed a similar construction of a Muslim suspect community in The Netherlands, mainly since 2011. The consequences of such stigma are even more present when the community has physical characteristics or accents that make them recognizable (Ylitalo-James, 2020). Cherney and Murphy (2016) confirm these results in a focus group study, where the experiences of Muslims carrying the burden of 'constant suspicion' are addressed. This feeling was more intense for Muslim women, attributed to visibility of a Muslim identity by clothing. Abbas (2019b) indicated an internalisation of a 'suspect identity' with members of this community, which creates internal division, and results in internal disciplinary measures. This enhanced suspicion and fear hinders an open dialogue between communities and abolishes safe spaces and trust (Abbas, 2019). Based on conversations with militant activists, de Koning (2019) discusses the impact of surveillance on day-to-day life and indicates routinization and mobilization. This literature has focused on feelings of surveillance and being perceived as suspicious. This dissertation wants to contribute to these insights by building upon the dominant narratives in society, addressed by the first research question. Thus, first knowledge is gathered on what specifically are these narratives and how they are expressed in society, and second these are discussed with members of the suspect community.

As the above section has indicated, a securitised discourse and being perceived as 'suspect' impacts communities (Abbas, 2019), while external labelling influences identities (Sigona, 2003). Moreover, discourses that sterilize into policy (Zetter, 1991) such as de-radicalisation programs (Qurashi, 2018), can be counterproductive, fostering a radicalisation process (Lenz-Raymann, 2014). Earlier research has discussed the experience of (the feeling of) surveillance (Cherney & Murphy, 2016; de Koning, 2019; Ylitalo-James, 2020) and the concept of 'radicalisation' with Islamic leaders in Brussels (Groeninck, 2019). Moreover, an active audience can decode frames in different ways than they were encoded (Gamson et al., 1992). This dissertation wants to add to this literature by gaining insight in experiences of the suspect community with dominant perspectives, analysing whether in-group/out-group processes appear in this context and how these narratives interplay with identity-building.

RQ2: How do members of the suspect community experience dominant perspectives?

1.3.4 Researching sensitive topics

The second research question leads to a search for a suitable methodology, as research on sensitive topics pose methodological and ethical challenges. Learning more about the experiences of the targeted communities with a sensitive topic implies attention for potential stigmatization and triggering of traumatic memories. Engaging in sensitive research often implies dealing with powerlessness and invisibility (Jansen & Davis, 1998), taking into account hierarchical positions of researchers over participants (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007). Sensitive research can bring distress to the participants (Adeloye et al., 2019) as they might fear disapproval, for example when talking about deviant behaviour (Elam & Fenton, 2003). Points of attention in such cases are: building upon a trust relationship (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007), create safe spaces for the participants to talk freely (Adeloye et al., 2019) and pay attention to the potential emotional distress of the researcher (Lee, 1993) and the participants (Decker et al., 2011).

Scholars have proposed the method of photo elicitation in similar contexts, where images are inserted into an interview (Harper, 2002). These can be either researcher-driven, where the researcher choses the visuals (e.g., Buckley, 2014) or participant-driven, where the participant decides which visuals to use (e.g., Kwesell, 2020). The method is valuable as it evokes new information on topics the researcher did not consider in advance (Allen, 2011), as well as more detailed conversations compared to standard interviews (Darbyshire et al., 2005). Photo elicitation is believed to trigger more in-depth conversations with time and space for emotions and memories (Bagnoli, 2009; Warner et al., 2016), and stimulate a more informal, less hierarchical positioning of researcher versus participant (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004). Based on these advantages, photo elicitation is often used with less powerful groups in society (Rose, 2016).

Although there are clear benefices to photo elicitation, when it comes to researching a sensitive topic, the method is limited as it might narrow the conversation as to what is literally depicted on the photos. For example, when aiming to discuss societal phenomena such as sexual harassment in the context of #metoo, using photos will easily fall into the depiction of certain incidents or persons. The conversation can thus be limited to discussing those incidents rather than the broader topic of #metoo. In a context of radicalisation, where the concept can

be seen as a floating signifier, there is ambiguity on the actual presence of 'radicalisation', thus, what photos to choose? Hence, the third research question of this dissertation is:

RQ3: How can the method of photo elicitation be enhanced to better facilitate research on sensitive topics?

1.3.5 Practical implications of research

Mechanisms of othering (Jones, 2017), combined with a focus on the in-group (Dunning & Harrison, 2010) supports an 'us versus them' thinking (Choma et al., 2015). As these are prevalent in the context of refugees and Muslims (Jones, 2017), and the concepts of migration and radicalisation can be seen as polarising, triggering social divide, the question arises how depolarising communication on comparable antithetical issues can be facilitated.

The processes of in-group sympathy and out-group antipathy is understood in scholarship as *affective polarisation* (Wagner, 2020). Not only the issue itself is subject to debate, the communicators describe the outsider group as hypocritical and closed-minded (Iyengar et al., 2019). This societal polarisation can be accelerated in an online environment, where pre-existing attitudes (Stroud, 2008) guide the selection of media consumption (Mutz & Martin, 2001). Being confronted with one-sided information can stimulate affective polarisation (Webster & Abramowitz, 2017) through an identification with more extreme ideas (Levendusky, 2013).

Scholars have focused on different strategies to respond to polarised issues, mostly concerning a depolarization of the situation. For example, Ahler and Sood (2018) advise to go against disinformation about the outside group and thus minimize social distance. Combining correct information with cultural meanings (Kahan et al., 2015) and a strategy of framing, in which a variety of identity factors is focused on rather than solely the in-group (Iyengar et al., 2019) should contribute to depolarisation. Frame debunking (invalidating the other frame) or frame saving (defending the own frame) are alternative framing strategies in light of polarised issues (McCaffrey & Keys, 2000). Debunking can be understood as deframing, refuting an opposing frame, and frame saving as a form of reframing, presenting an alternative viewpoint without referral to the opposing frame. These insights are added with research on the contact hypothesis (Pettigrew, 1998), assuming that "positive interaction between members of different groups tend to reduce intergroup prejudice" (McKeown & Dixon, 2017, p. 1). Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) support this statement as their meta-analysis concludes a negative relationship between contact and prejudice in nearly 94% of all studies on contact theory. In online

environments, these insights are translated to storytelling (Husnu et al., 2018) or imagined contact (Crisp & Turner, 2009). Attention to negative (Vasilopoulos et al., 2019) and positive (Yu et al., 2021) emotions in polarised debates aim to learn more about individual responses, as language sentiment influences polarisation (Buder et al., 2021). For example, people might feel anxiety to discuss their personal opinion if they feel the environment is hostile (Matthes et al., 2018). In this case, they might actively choose to ignore the conflict (Wang et al., 2012), censoring their own opinions (Hayes, 2007) to protect the relationship (Afifi & Guerrero, 2000). This decision correlates to the friendly or hostile climate (Matthes et al., 2018), personal character (Jang et al., 2014) and topic (Hayes, 2007). Ultimately, *a spiral of silence* can emerge (Noelle-Neumann, 1993), people remaining silent when they estimate others to hold different opinions, in fear of social isolation. This can result in a silencing of minority opinions, especially in polarised settings. Such climate may force people to take sides or, alternatively, to remain silent, strengthening the perception of a polarised environment.

The research on responding to polarising issues has provided insights in different aspects of the debate (censorship, emotion, content), however rarely presents concrete tools to apply the research results to practice. Building upon these earlier insights, the fourth and final research question of this dissertation is to see how the combined insights of the different studies can add to this literature and offer practical tools to tackle antithetical issues:

RQ4: How can the performed research contribute to practical knowledge on depolarising communication on antithetical issues?

1.4 The PhD trajectory

1.4.1 Focus on Belgium

The focus of this dissertation is Belgium, a complex country geographically situated in the heart of Europe. The following section outlines the socio-political context of the region. First of all, it is a country with a multiparty system and a strong linguistic divide between Francophone and Flemish regions, which is reflected in a linguistic divided media use representing linguistically divisive issues (Sinardet, 2013). The country has known multiple ‘migration waves’, for example the Belgian history of ‘gastarbeiders’ [labour migrants] in the 30 years following the second World War. However, migrants nor their descendants are really perceived as Flemings but rather as a separate cultural group labelled ‘allochtonen’ (Kaya, 2009).

Secondly, the country has known intensive debate on migration and considering its geographical location, Belgium is an important transit country for migration to the United Kingdom (Derluyn & Broekaert, 2005). The Brussels North' railway station is a cluster for refugees aiming to embark on a journey to the UK, which clashed the intentions of different parties: Belgium urging people to apply for asylum, while the majority wants to continue traveling (Puschmann et al., 2019). This resulted in refuged people living in very poor living conditions in the Maximiliaan park next to the train station.

Thirdly, the country is a popular destination for secondary migration (Hoon et al., 2020): people arriving at the borders of the European Union often continue their travels to the heart of the continent. This is in addition to people directly travelling to Belgium. In 2015 – the year marked as the 'refugee crisis' – 35,476 people (CGVS, 2016) asked for international protection. These people were mostly coming from Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan. In 2019, nearly 28,000 people requested this protection (CGVS, 2020), a number rising again over the last years. Belgium has responded to this rise in requests in an ambivalent way: according to Puschmann et al. (2019), there is a discrepancy between the reporting of the then Secretary of State of Asylum and Migration Theo Francken, and the actual migration policy. The authors state that the policy is presented as very strict although Belgium applied a more liberal approach towards refugees in that period (Puschmann et al., 2019).

A cross-national evaluation of twenty European countries, comparing attitudes from 2002 to 2016, indicates that individual attitudes towards migration seem to be stable over the years, with a slightly stronger feeling of economic than cultural threat (Van Hootegem & Meuleman, 2019). Recently in Flanders, the issue urges concrete action from both sides of the spectrum. For example, the debate on the signing of the UN-Migration pact (reframed as 'the Marrakesh-pact'), lead to a 'Mars *against* Marrakesh' on December 16, 2018, where multiple people got injured (*Het Nieuwsblad*, 2018). The same day, a "Mars *for* Marrakesh" was organised, in reaction to the first demonstration. However, opposed to, for example, Hungary or Germany, the Belgian stance towards migration is not explicit, and internal debate incorporates a bandwidth of viewpoints.

Fourthly, Belgian citizens have left the country to go fight in Syria, a process that later became known as radicalisation (Coolsaet, 2016b). In an effort to respond to this unexpected event, and in fear of youth returning and launching violent attacks on European soil (a fear to become true years later), Belgian local communities (Vilvoorde, Antwerpen, Mechelen,

Maaseik) proposed a brochure: 'Controlling Muslim Radicalisation: A Guide for Policy and Practice' (Fadil et al., 2019). Responses such as risk-assessment, de-radicalisation programs, typologies of potential radicalised individuals and counter narratives against violent extremism were launched (Colaert, 2017). Colaert (2017) warns for the use of such checklists, bearing in mind the potential backlash on Muslims being regarded as suspect for wearing a beard or hijab which undermines the trust relationship with a prevention worker – and is inherently islamophobic.

Lastly, Belgian inhabitants have been linked to the terrorist attacks in Paris (2015) and Brussels (2016). Some neighbourhoods in Belgian cities such as Antwerp, Vilvoorde, Molenbeek and Verviers were connected to the attack in Paris, as the residence or hiding place of persons who were responsible. In 2016, Belgium itself was victim of terrorist attacks where 32 people were killed and 270 injured. In line with the migration-terrorism nexus, events were linked to migration, encouraging a security perspective on the concepts of migration and radicalisation.

Both 'migration' and 'radicalisation' have been high on the political and societal agenda in Belgium. Immigration, security and terrorism (TNS, 2016) were among the main concerns of Belgians, however these have altered following the terrorist attacks in 2016. Currently, the worries on terrorism seem to have eased, while immigration is still an urgent problem according to Belgian inhabitants (Kantar, 2019).

1.4.2 Insights in research trajectory

The presented PhD is based on a specific trajectory, building upon funding of short-term projects. The several projects are the following: a study on the framing of multicultural society in the Netherlands (financed by the Ministry of Social Affairs in The Hague, The Netherlands, from September 2017 to June 2018); an experiment on the effects of tweets by politicians on migration (funded by NGO 11.11.11, from July 2018 to September 2018); a study on the framing of radicalisation in Belgium and the method of cartoon elicitation (part of CONRAD, funded by BELSPO, from May 2017 to May 2019) and lastly a study on the (re)framing of migration and refugees (funded by the Benevolentia Foundation, Amsterdam, and followed-up by Porticus, from June 2019 to June 2020). The trajectory of the PhD has posed a challenge for the composition of the dissertation. Chapter 2 incorporates the results of the study on the reframing of migration and refugees, while Chapter 3, 4 and 5 are based on the interdisciplinary

CONRAD project of framing radicalisation. Finally, Chapter 6 incorporates insights from all performed studies.

Researchers positionality

In research on social issues, and specifically on sensitive topics such as migration and radicalisation, questions may rise on the researcher's positionality. This is shaped by the researcher's upbringing, ethnicity, social class, gender, sexuality, religious faith, political allegiance, etc. (Wellington et al., 2005). This positionality is not only relevant when it comes to research methods or result interpretations, but also to what is chosen as a research topic (Grix, 2019). Reflection on this positionality is an ongoing process during the research (Gary & Holmes, 2020). In the conclusion of this dissertation, I will reflect back on how this positionality might have changed over the years and more specifically how it might have influenced the research process. As for now, I reflect on my personal background and lenses that can be relevant to this context. I am a young, female, white researcher, with a background in political sciences and specialization in Middle Eastern Studies, where I followed in-depth courses on Islam, Islamic Philosophy and Law, and the political history of the Middle East. From then (2015) until this day (2021) I study an Arabic language course. I have always had a specific interest in the Israeli-Palestinian casus, and was a research intern in Tel Aviv and Nablus in 2016. In full pandemic, October 2020, I married my partner Yassin, whose (grand)parents migrated from Morocco to Belgium. I was warmly welcomed into his family where I was reintroduced to the value of (Islamic) religion. I am strongly convinced that research should be society-oriented, and approached the PhD trajectory with the same aim: to continue an interplay between different stakeholders, with concrete, practically applicable outcomes.

1.5 Dissertation outline

The dissertation comprises three parts, the first two consisting of two chapter and the last consisting of one chapter. The first part (Chapter 2 and 3) focuses on the content; the second part (Chapter 4 and 5) develops an outlook on perception and the methodological quest to facilitate this research. Part 3 (Chapter 6) translates the research to a practical guideline and suggests how to use the results in concrete communication strategies when discussing polarised topics. Chapter 2 and 3 provide an answer to the first research question: how to go beyond a polarising dichotomy. Chapter 5 answers the second research question, with an analysis of the experiences of the suspect community. Chapter 4 focuses on the third research question,

namely the quest for an alternative methodology. Finally, Chapter 6 responds to the fourth research question in order to facilitate communication on polarising issues.

Each of the chapters can be read individually, in a self-chosen order. Following the structure of the PhD trajectory, the studies are mostly part of separate projects; however put together they contribute to insights in the framing and perception of framing of polarising topics. In what follows, a brief explanation will be given of each study, explain the aims and how it adds to the narratives on migration and radicalisation and how targeted communities perceive them.

1.5.1 Part I: Content

The first part of the dissertation concentrates on the public discourse in Belgium on the concepts 'migration' and 'radicalisation'. In order to move beyond a polarised dichotomy, and answer the first research question, the first two chapters build on inductive and deductive framing analyses to reconstruct the different narratives.

A vast amount of international research has been done on the framing of migration, where the 'victim versus intruder' opposition is a returning dichotomy. **Chapter 2** looks beyond the opposition that is polarising, problematizing and limiting, and looks further into the framing attention cycle with regard to the migration-terrorism nexus. This chapter combines two studies, an inductive and a deductive framing analysis. By use of an inductive framing analysis, based on 2,000 fragments from a broad range of the public debate, an overview is reconstructed of the prevailing perspectives on migration and refugees in Flanders. As such, the results will provide insight in the potential (counter-)frames that offer alternatives to the dichotomy. These results are validated in expert interviews and a focus group with multiple stakeholders. Additionally, a deductive analysis over a longer time period will tell more about the dynamics of frame use. The matching of these results to key events creates a better understanding of the framing attention cycle.

As with migration, radicalisation has been the topic of lively debate in Belgium. Although little research is done on this framing, a similar limiting dichotomy is identified. Moreover, the concept of radicalisation risks to become a floating signifier, in which it means different things to different people. As such, the concept might become redundant. **Chapter 3** aims to identify this variety of interpretations in the Belgian public debate and does so by leaning on an extensive inductive framing analysis, supplemented with validation interviews with a diversity of stakeholders (imams, youth workers, academics, journalists). The

combination of Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 respond to the first research question, as they investigate the narratives on migration and radicalisation in Flanders and Belgium and indicate how to go beyond a polarising dichotomy.

1.5.2 Part II: Perception

The second part of the dissertation centres on the experiences of the 'suspect community' with the framing of polarising concepts, in this case radicalisation. This part answers the second research question, by analysing the perception of young people with a migration background from Molenbeek, Verviers and Antwerp on the dominant discourse. As an overrepresented silenced minority, they are disproportionally represented in the public debate (e.g., in media), however members of the community are rarely heard nor seen as the audience of these mediated messages. As this involves sensitive research, the quest for a suitable methodology is essential. Thus, this second part of the dissertation provides an answer to the third research question: How can the method of photo elicitation be enhanced to better facilitate research on sensitive topics?

Chapter 4 presents a methodological analysis of the search for a fitted methodology to facilitate research on sensitive topics. It builds upon insights from photo elicitation, as this has proven to empower participants and stimulate more detailed and in-depth conversations. However, the ambiguity of the concept radicalisation leads to questions on what to depict on the photos used in the conversations. Additionally, these photos mainly represent specific events or people that might distract the participant to debate these events rather than dominant discourses on radicalisation – the aim of the research. In this chapter, this process and the developed cartoon-elicitation method are elaborately explained. This method provided the basis for Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 delves into the conversations with the members of the suspect community. In a combination of in-depth one-on-one interviews and focus groups facilitated by cartoon elicitation, the experiences with the dominant framing of radicalisation are analysed. As such, this chapter answers the second research question, focusing on the interaction of the suspect community with prevailing discourses. It is evaluated whether the trends of othering and in-group/out-group thinking occur in these reflections on radicalisation, and if so, how.

1.5.3 Part III: Applicability

Up to now, the dissertation has presented theoretical and empirical insights in the narratives and experiences with the framing of migration and radicalisation in Belgium. The insights of

the previous chapters are the building blocks of **Chapter 6,** which aims to translate these theoretical results to a practical guideline with concrete communication advice and as such, answer the final research question: How can the performed research contribute to practical knowledge on depolarising communication on antithetical issues? To be able to answer these questions, the results of additional implemented studies[1] are added. The chapter builds upon previous research on responding to polarising issues, indicating how the dissertation adds to this knowledge based on migration and radicalisation research and lastly, presents practical guidelines.

[1]Van Gorp, B., Van Hove J., Figoureux, M., & Vyncke, B. (2021). Anders communiceren over migratie en vluchtelingen: Aan de slag met frames en counter-frames. Leuven: Institute for Media Studies. Online: https://limo.libis.be/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=LIRIAS3376574&context=L&vid=Lirias&search_scope=Lirias&tab=default_tab&lang=en_US
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PART I: CONTENT

Chapter 2. “Taking Back Control”: Framing Migration Beyond the Intruder–Victim Dichotomy

This chapter looks beyond the victim-intruder opposition in migration framing research by performing an inductive and deductive framing analysis. Based on 2,000 fragments taken from the public debate on migration in Flanders, a reconstruction of eight (counter-)frames brings nuance in the traditional opposition with the *Taking back control* frame. A deductive analysis performed on a representative sample (N=2,166) over five years in four leading Flemish newspapers showed the dominance of this frame in Flemish media. Furthermore, the framing attention cycle changed in correlation with key-events. Taking a spectrum of (counter-)frames into account could enhance migration framing research and public debate.

2.1 Introduction

‘The long summer of migration’ in 2015 (Hess et al., 2017) was not only memorable because of the large numbers of people on the move, but also because of the extent in which media were covering this movement (Rea et al., 2019). The documentation by migrants themselves via smartphones gave Europeans a front row seat in this mass journey (d’Haenens et al., 2019). By the end of that summer, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel declared the catchphrase ‘Wir schaffen das’ (‘We will manage this’), in spirit of the Refugees Welcome movement, which spread hospitality across European borders (della Porta, 2018a). However, not all countries reacted with openness and solidarity towards the arrival of migrants and refugees (Boukala & Dimitrakopoulou, 2018; Rea et al., 2019). A simultaneous timing of the so-called refugee crisis and a series of terrorist attacks in Western Europe melted the newcomers identity with a menacing picture of terrorists, known as the migration-terrorism nexus (Galantino, 2020). A security frame is placed in opposition with a humanitarian frame (Bosilkov & Drakaki, 2018; Colombo, 2018).

Classifying in deserving and undeserving migrants (Dhaliwal & Forkert, 2015) has major implications for further treatment, inclusion and exclusion of refugees (Goodman et al., 2017). A refugee is referred to as someone leaving their country for humanitarian reasons, for example fleeing a war zone (Rea et al., 2019), which is more likely to evoke empathy in public opinion (Fassin, 2012; Patler & Gonzales, 2015). This attitude is opposed to an economic migrant, which would be used to describe people seeking better conditions for their lives in an economic matter, which is seen as less preferable by the public (Rea et al., 2019). The labelling of a minority group as ‘migrant’, and dividing between good and bad migrants, results in the treatment of these people as such, with unequal valuations of human lives and discriminatory policies as a result (Brons, 2015; van Houtum & Boedeltje, 2009).

There thus lies power in the labelling of another person’s identity, moreover, according to Leinonen (2012), the notion of ‘immigrant’ is highly racialized and class-based: white migrants are considered expats, unproblematic for society and as such acceptable. Perceived unskilled labourers with low income are labelled migrants, who are less deserving than the high-income ‘knowledged’ expats. Besides leaning on ethnic presumptions, these identifications are linked to education and income, as migrant permits can be granted based on expected benefice for the host country. The categorisation results into deciding who is welcome in a country (d’Haenens & Joris, 2019). The term ‘migrant’ symbolizes a collective identity

assuming ‘hard-working’, hence exploitable, and ‘less deserving’ people (McAreavey, 2017). Through the creation of such label, identities are socially constructed (Sigona, 2003). Not only ‘refugees’ and ‘migrants’ are named, categorised and as such created, but also second-generation (Somerville, 2008) or third-generation migrants (Mannitz, 2005).

A deserving and undeserving categorisation of migrants relates to the victim–intruder dichotomy, also known as the security-humanitarian opposition, often adhered to in migration framing studies (Awny, 2019; Bosilkov & Drakaki, 2018; Durán, 2013; Mazzara et al., 2020; Van Gorp, 2005), which is insufficient to adequately describe reality. The presentation of reality through a victim–intruder lens obscures the complex reality of migration. The *problematization* of migration by for example journalists, policy makers, scientists and action groups as a form of attention seeking is deemed necessary to remedy an issue. The framing of refugees and asylum seekers in negative frames is so dominant, according to Baker and McEnery (2005), that references to these frames are even found in documents by UNHCR. However, this approach obscures the frames that do not problematize an issue, but look at the concern in a deproblematizing way, uncovering alternative aspects of reality.

Additionally, from a societal perspective, portrayals of refugees and migrants as either stereotypical victims or intruders are both *polarising*, and therefore problematic in this societal context. While the intruder perspective indicates a threat and leads to migration restrictions, the victim frame categorises deserving and non-deserving refugees based on the Geneva Convention. Moreover, the victim frame implies external help and a passive flight, describing a dependent refugee. Due to this polarisation, the migration debate is only presented in two opposing ways with only two possible exits out of the migration ‘issue’. This is limiting, thereby excluding potential alternative policy options.

Previous framing that aimed to go beyond this dichotomy with the inclusion of non-dominant views (e.g., Ramasubramanian & Miles, 2018; Roggeband & Vliegenthart, 2007) refrain from including an integral logical reasoning explicating of the mostly issue-specific frames. A more complete inventory enables grasping the complex reality of migration and all its nuances. Introducing non-problematizing perspectives offers a counterweight to the usually prominent problematizing frames, labelled ‘counter-frames’ (cfr. Chong & Druckman, 2010; Van Gorp & Vercruysse, 2012). This research explores the frame use in Flanders, the northern part of Belgium. From a migration perspective, the Belgian context is relevant considering its geographical location, being a so-called transit country for migration towards the UK as well

as being a popular destination for secondary migration in Europe. Firstly, this study aims to go beyond the dichotomy by performing an inductive framing analysis that intends to identify a fuller range of frames. Secondly, the categorisation will distinguish between problematizing frames, portraying migration and refugees as a problem, and deproblematizing (counter-)frames, defining migration and refugees *not* as a problem. An inventory of the frames used by written press gives insight in the use of this dichotomy, or how they manage to transcend it.

2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 Framing migration and refugees

This research builds on framing theory, a concept with different interpretations in the literature. Frames are “organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world” (Reese, 2001, p. 11). As such, framing is a process where complicated, social issues gain meaning by demarcating them, indicating the cause of the problem, consequences and potential solutions (Entman, 1993). Thus, along with the varying problem definition, the suggested solutions will change. This socially shared cultural framework is activated when people communicate. Hence, if an audience encounters reasoning (e.g., causes, consequences, solutions) or framing (e.g., word choice, metaphors, images) devices, the complete logical reasoning of such frame is triggered (Van Gorp, 2007b). The combination of framing and reasoning devices, and a shared cultural value is referred to as a ‘frame package’. From a social constructionist perspective, frames help systematize reality (Gamson & Modigliani, 1994) while the media representation influences how the public perceives this reality, as well as behaves in it (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). For example, if migration is presented as an ‘invasion’ with potential ‘rapists’ and ‘criminals’, it triggers the socially shared framework of an ‘intruder’ with the logical reference to a securitised solution towards migration. Consequently, this interaction can lead to the social construction of ‘a migrant’ and influence behaviour as well as policy. There is thus an active audience reacting to the prevailing frames.

Based upon the implications of the term ‘migrant’, namely the categorisation of wanted and unwanted migrants (Mügge & van der Haar, 2016) as well as the social construction of a minority with substantial consequences for example in policy (Brons, 2015) as well as identity-building (Sigona, 2003), for multiple generations, it could be argued to refrain from using the term in this research design. However, the presented research focuses on the framing of

migration in the public debate, in which this term plays a central role. The focal point is thus not understanding or defining migration in itself, but rather the social construction of it in the public debate. Therefore, the terminology of this public debate is central in this research design. By using the term migrant, there is no intent to stigmatise nor reinforce potential implications, rather in this contribution it refers to the concept of 'migrant' as a social construct.

Looking at the implications of the social construction of migration through a victim-intruder lens, inadequate of capturing the complex reality of migration, earlier framing studies have already reconstructed more extensive typologies, of which the victim-intruder were part, sometimes under a different name. For example, Ramasubramanian and Miles (2018) categorised four frames. Firstly, the 'war frame', focusing on the dangerous situation in home countries as well as guest countries; secondly the 'institutional frame', with a focus on the responsibility of institutions; thirdly, the 'borders frame', looking at the responsibility of neighbouring countries and lastly, the 'victim frame', a lens on the personal experience and consequences of fleeing. Roggeband and Vliegenthart (2007) came to a fivefold typology. Adding to the victim and intruder frame, the researchers recognize a 'multicultural frame', where diversity and thus migration is an added value to society; an 'emancipation frame', where refugees and migrants are underdeveloped and encouraged to educate themselves in the new home country; and lastly, the 'restriction frame'; claiming that migration is an economic phenomenon of women marrying into Western countries. Focusing on Flanders, Cleen et al. (2017) distinguish three dominant themes: culturalist (focus on race or religion), economic (focus on economic arguments) and securitarian (focus on newcomers as dangerous). D'Amato and Lucarelli (2019) define this latter perspective as the Westphalian narrative, emphasizing the need for a firm security policy.

There are, however, two reasons for reconsidering these typologies. Firstly, the typologies are mostly issue-specific frames that are focused on the theme 'migration'. Implementing a more generic approach enables a broader application on different issues. In this way, the frames refer to deeper values in society. Secondly, earlier typologies do not present an entire reasoning behind a frame. Explicitly presenting the logical reasoning, from definition to offered solution (called reasoning devices) and the used framing devices (e.g. words, metaphors, visuals) help its meaning and functioning better. Thus the first research question is:

RQ1: What are the prevailing problematizing frames and deproblematizing counter-frames on migration and refugees in Flanders?

2.2.2 Dynamic prevalence of frames

Media reporting is said to have a conceivable effect on public opinion (Blinder & Jeannet, 2018; Eberl et al., 2018; Meltzer et al., 2020). The mere visibility of the topic of migration in the media correlates with a rise in negative attitudes towards migration (Eberl et al., 2018). Therefore, the excessive media focus on migration is associated with an overestimation of immigration statistics (Dunaway et al., 2010). In sum, news content effectively shapes attitudes towards immigrants (Van Klingeren, 2014).

Assuming that dominant frames influence the public’s attitudes, it is relevant to reflect on the intertwinement of the framing of migration with the framing of race, Muslims and Islamophobia. As Hall (1996, p. 35) stated: “The media construct for us a definition of what race is, what meaning the imagery of race carries, and what the ‘problem of race’ is understood to be”. There is an intersection of racism and immigrant reporting (Vidra & Fox, 2014). Studies that focus on the framing of Muslims after 9/11 have found depictions of Muslims to be monolithic, with ‘dangerous men’ and ‘endangered women’ (Bakali, 2016). Close associations are made between terrorism and people perceived to be of Arab or Muslim descent (Welch, 2016). Moreover, the migration-terrorism nexus connects discourses on terrorism to discourses on migration (Galantino, 2020). Such intertwinement contributes to the social construction of images of migrants and refugees.

Continuing on the assumed effect of media representation and the association of negative framing with racism and Islamophobia, there lies interest in uncovering the prevalence of the reconstructed frames (RQ1) in the public debate. Additionally, news media are important agenda setters (McCombs, 1997) where topics are determined. Framing can be considered second-level agenda setting, not only setting *what* is to be discussed but also *how* it should be discussed. Earlier research on migration news content has focused on the source and content. First and foremost, there is the importance of applying multiple media options (Oyeoku et al., 2020) to provide a multitude in perspectives. Power and authority play a role in the spread of perspectives (Pugh & Moya, 2020; Zaman & Das, 2020). Furthermore, not only text (Allen & Blinder, 2010) but also visuals (Greenwood & Thomson, 2020) highlight differences more than connections or integration, with a strong focus on men over women (Lind & Meltzer, 2020). De Cock, Sundin and Mistiaen (2019) performed a content analysis on Belgian newspapers,

covering the period 2015 – 2017, uncovering the themes addressed in public debate. They indicated a strong focus on Syrian refugees, and peak attention periods such as the summer of 2015. These results give insight in the covered themes; however, the presented study aims to uncover the prevalence of the socially shared *frames* with regard to the social construction of migration and refugees. This results in the second research question:

RQ2: Which frames or counter-frames are most prevalent in the Flemish media?

Inductive research indicates what frames are present, while deductive research might present solely a snapshot. Framing is a dynamic process, not a static given. In accordance with the issue attention cycle (Downs, 1991), the use of frames and counter-frames can change overtime in a framing attention cycle. A longitudinal study by Beckers and Van Aelst (2019) in Flanders indicates a changing narrative during the so-called crisis, with the use of a criminal perspective on commercial broadcasting and the inclusion of citizens and immigrant voices on public broadcasting. Different narratives might be used over different phases (Shih et al., 2008; Sulaiman-Hill et al., 2011). Longitudinal analysis has shown conflict to impact the news framing cycle (Gottlieb, 2015). For example, Hall (2002) suggests that far-reaching security policies in response to terrorism will be less supported by the public, if there is little attention for a potential security threat. Moreover, earlier shifts in news coverage on refugees have been reported following key events such as 9/11 (Sulaiman-Hill et al., 2011). These key events are linked to the migration-terrorism nexus (Galantino, 2020), the convergence of discourse on migration and terrorism enhancing the perspective of migrants as a threat. Brosius and Eps (1995) confirm the interaction between key events and news selection on asylum seekers. In contrast, Czymara and Van Klingeren (2021) contradict these findings, studying the news media reporting during the so-called migration crisis in Germany in relation to key events, and report no relation between both. The importance of key events in relation to the framing of migration and refugees is thus unclear. Hence, the final research question is:

RQ3: Does the framing on migration and refugees in Flanders change over time and in relation to key events?

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 Case: Flanders

Belgium, the focus of this dissertation, knows a strong linguistic divide between Francophone and Flemish regions. This chapter zooms in on the Dutch-speaking Flanders, which has a long

history of ‘gastarbeiders’ [labour migrants] whose descendants continue to be perceived as a separate entity, ‘allochtonen’ (Kaya, 2009). According to the Migration Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), which is built upon 167 policy indicators indicating the steps to full citizenship, Belgium lists seventh, holding multiple hurdles to integration for newcomers (d’Haenens et al., 2019). In 2015, 35,476 people (CGVS, 2016) requested asylum in Belgium, a rise of 178 percent compared to 2014 (d’Haenens et al., 2019). In 2019 28,000 people applied (CGVS, 2020), a number said to be rising again over the last years. As the country is an important transit country for migration to the United Kingdom (Derluyn & Broekaert, 2005), and is a popular destination for secondary migration (Hoon et al., 2020), intensive public debate centred on migration policy. In 2018, the signing of the UN-Migration pact, which was named the ‘Marrakesh-pact’ in Flanders, lead to both a ‘Mars against Marrakesh’ as well as a Mars for Marrakesh (Nieuwsblad, 2018). In 2016, a combination of terrorism, security and immigration were the main concerns of Belgians (TNS, 2016). Over the years, immigration remained an important worry with an increasing negative attitude (De Coninck et al., 2018).

The public debate and attitudes are connected to the adopted policy and thus political landscape of the region. The Flemish elections of 2014 resulted in a polarised outcome: a substantial win for N-VA, right-wing party, as well as a smaller win for Groen, left-wing party. The centre parties lost votes. From October 2014 to December 2018, Theo Francken of the right-wing party N-VA was Secretary of State of Asylum and Migration. He was known for a harsh discourse on migration, relying on word use as ‘cleaning up’ and ‘chasing them’ (Puschmann et al., 2019). Moreover, during his policy term, the critique of his lack of humanity not only referred to language use, but also to reporting of Sudanese refugees who reportedly were tortured upon repatriation to Sudan, and the death by police bullet of the toddler Mawda in 2018 (Puschmann et al., 2019). From December 2018 to October 2020, Maggie De Block of the liberal party Open Vld obtained the position of Secretary of State of Asylum and Migration. In 2019, new elections were held for Flemish parliament. N-VA lost votes, compared to Vlaams Belang, the extreme right-wing party, which won significantly.

2.3.2 Study 1: Inductive frame analysis

Sample

The reconstruction of the frames was based on an inductive framing analysis (see Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Matthes & Kohring, 2008; Van Gorp, 2010). Aiming to include dominant and non-dominant perspectives in the debate, hence broadening the search to online fora and alternative media, a purposive sample was collected. The inductive analysis does not enable

comparison between sources but rather intends to present a substantiated overview of potential perspectives. Written press, the main newspapers, magazines, opinionated websites, partisan media on the left and right political spectrum, political party statements and programs were included. In the sample, sources such as *Doorbraak* or *'t Pallieterke* are considered (extreme) right-wing in the Flemish media landscape, and have been compromised with regard to potential racist content (Talhaoui, 2017). The aim of this inductive analysis was to obtain an overview of *all* potential perspectives on migration and refugees in Flanders, thus the search extended to wide-ranging sources. Therefore, the public discourse on Twitter was enclosed by manually collecting via search terms such as 'migration', 'migrant', 'refugee' and 'asylum seeker', including known and unknown accounts, and instantly anonymizing tweets[2]. This enables the inclusion of citizens' perspectives that might provide alternative views over printed and online press. Dating from 2015, the start of the so-called migration crisis, to 2019, the authors included all fragments that included 'migration' and/or 'refugees'. It could be argued to perform research separately on 'migration' or 'refugees'. However, it appeared that in the public debate the terms are used interchangeably. As it became impossible to disentangle the concepts, the distinction was not further taken into account.

Coding procedure

Going through the purposive sample, the authors coded 2,000 textual fragments containing framing devices (words, metaphors or arguments) (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989) referring directly or indirectly to migration or refugees, its causes, consequences, solutions and possibly moral judgements (reasoning devices) (see further Figoureux & Van Gorp, 2020; Van Gorp, 2007). This thematic analysis revealed already patterns in the material that were further explored during an axial coding procedure. For example, refugees were repeatedly depicted as barbaric, uncivilized foreigners with a backwards religion, norms and values that are conflicting with Western values. The word choice indicated a 'clash of civilisations'. Fragments indicating a similar intruding perspective were equally coded. The authors searched for links between different elements, fragments that expresses a similar idea and that were logically bound together. A frame matrix was drafted in which these logical building blocks

[2] All sources are: (1) written media and opinions: *De Morgen*, *De Standaard*, *DS weekblad*, *De Tijd*, *Het Belang van Limburg*, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, *Het Nieuwsblad*, *Kerk en Leven*, *Trends*, *De Gazet der Unie Zorgelozen, Humo, Knack*, *Krant van West-Vlaanderen*, *Libelle*, reactnieuws.net, apache.be, christopdegreef.com, newsmonkey.be, *Story*, *De Zondag, 't Pallieterke*, dewereldmorgen.be, sceptr.net, doorbraak.be, *Mo Magazine,* Belga, Bruzz*,* peoplesphere.be*, Gazet van Antwerpen;* (2) tv and radio programs: Radio 2, VRT NWS, VTM Nieuws, De Zevende dag; (3) social media: Twitter, Instagram, Facebook; (4) political parties: groen.be, n-va.be, vlaamsbelang.be, pvda.be, s-p-a.be, openvld.be, cdenv.be; (5) organisations: Amnesty International, vluchtelingenwerkvlaanderen.be, adecco.be, VBO, computertaal.info.

were sharply delineated. The actual frame is the coherent cultural idea, linking the separate devices into a frame package. The names of these overarching frames could represent an archetype, a cultural theme or a metaphor, capturing the underlying perspective. An overview of the reconstructed frame packages can be found in the frame matrix in Appendix A.

Validation

While interpreting data, external validation can counter potential researcher bias (Van Gorp, 2010). A researcher’s background and perspective can affect the interpretation of results. Therefore, twenty-two face-to-face member-check interviews and one focus group were carried out to compensate researcher subjectivity. In these validation moments, all reconstructed (counter-)frames were discussed one by one. The participants were asked to give arguments pro and contra migration, including causes and consequences. The interviewees—experts, journalists, politicians (both left-wing and right-wing) and opinion makers, active in the public debate on migration and refugees and with diversified perspectives—reflected upon the credibility and recognisability of the (counter-)frames. Finally, the respondents were asked to rank the (counter-)frames as how they estimated their presence in Flemish media. In the focus group, nine people with a flight story were invited to discuss the different perspectives, performing similar validation. This focus group provided insight in the experiences of the concerned group and included their perspective on prevailing perspectives, as well as both the focus group and member-check interviews contributed to the creation of an exhaustive (i.e., covering every aspect) and mutual exclusive (i.e., eliminating overlapping frames) frame matrix. For example, the interviews provided insight how these (counter-)frames were perceived as potentially polarising (see further, Chapter 6), and how they related to each other. The member-check interviews helped clarify the focuses of the four frames as they are all related to each other. For example, the different insights helped distinguish a focus on chaotic mismanagement within a *Taking back control* perspective, compared to a focus on danger within *The hostile intruder.* Additionally, the participants distinguished the *The innocent victim* frame only to be applicable for refugees, not migrants. This however was not compatible with the data that applied the frame to both migrants and refugees.

2.3.3 Study 2: Deductive frame analysis

Sample

The deductive analysis was based on news articles selected via GoPress Academic using eighteen different search terms[3]. This resulted in 22,192 articles of which a 9,76% sample was coded, which provided a 95% confidence level and a confidence interval of 2%[4]. This representative sample of 2,167 news articles dating over a period of 5 years (1 July 2014 to 30 June 2019) issued from the four most-read Flemish newspapers (VRM, 2019) *De Morgen* and *De Standaard* (considered quality newspapers), *Het Laatste Nieuws* and *Het Nieuwsblad* (considered popular newspapers). *De Standaard,* founded in 1918 from a Catholic-conservative origin, is part of *Mediahuis* publishing company. *De Morgen* has a socialist background starting 1978, and is now part of *DPG Media. Het Laatste Nieuws,* founded in 1888 in liberal spirit, belongs to *DPG Media* publishing company. *Het Nieuwsblad* is part of *Mediahuis,* established in 1929 by *De Standaard* to reach a broader audience. Belonging to the same media conglomerate can mean that articles are published in both so-called popular and quality newspapers, which was only the case for 5 articles in the sample. These were included as the newspapers decided to publish these articles and frames. On GoPress Academic, articles were searched for per newspaper for a 5 year time period (1 July 2014 to 30 June 2019). These were then sorted by relevance to select the articles that centred on migration and refugees, and not, for example, a theatre play on migration. To ensure a randomized sample including the entire period, each tenth hit of GoPress Academic was selected.

Coding procedures

The inductive phase resulted in the reconstruction of four frames and four counter-frames. In the deductive phase, the level of presence of these frames in the press was systematically ascertained, as an answer to RQ2 and RQ3.

The authors constructed a codebook with three sections. A first section focused on general information about the news article: outlet, title, publication date, and journalistic genre. The data collection medium did not support the inclusion of word count. There is thus no information on the exact length of the articles. The second section indicated the source, that is, does a refugee or first-generation migrant get a literal citation (y/n)*;* the scope (national or

[3] 'Migrant', 'migrants', 'migration', 'transmigrant', 'transmigrants', 'illegal', 'illegal migrant', 'illegal migrants', 'illegal migration', 'illegal immigrant', 'immigrant', 'immigrants', 'refugee', 'refugees', 'asylum seeker', 'asylum seekers', 'refugee numbers'

[4] Determined via https://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm

international), and topic (refugees and/or migration). A general set of rules was listed to indicate the presence of the eight frames. For each frame, three qualifications were listed. When one of the conditions was met, a frame was coded as present (y/n). In this study, it is thus theoretically possible for a news article to contain up to eight different perspectives. Examples of framing devices were listed for each frame. When in doubt, a frame was coded as ‘non-present’. In case of a deframe, when a frame is explicitly mentioned and refuted, this perspective is potentially reinforced in audience perception (Lakoff, 2004). The coders decided to separately code deframes, thus when a frame was included in a newspaper article in the sole purpose of denying and contradicting its argument (y/n). Thus, in such case, both the frame and deframe were coded as ‘yes’. However, during the coding procedure, explicit deframes were rarely present – only in 91 articles of the entire sample. Deframes were more subtly present and caused debate among the coders. Only explicit mentions, for example, ‘refugees are not invading the country’ were considered deframes.

The first and third author each coded a subsample of 10% of the full sample of posts (*N*=200) to measure intercoder reliability using Cohen’s Kappa. The results were moderate to high for all frames (κ range .7 - .86) except the frames *Panta Rhei* ($\kappa = 0$) and *The welfare gap* ($\kappa = .65$) (for an overview, see Table 1). Only a small number of articles contained these last two frames, which enlarges the chances for coding disagreements. If in 100 articles only 2 articles contain this frame, the logic of calculating Cohen’s Kappa is that both coders need to identify this frame correctly. One mistake then results in the conclusion: unreliable. However, if a frame is present in 50 out of 100 articles, one mistake is less problematic (see further: Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999).

Table 1 Values of intercoder reliability for each frame expressed in Cohen's Kappa

Frame	**Cohen’s Kappa**
Clash of civilisations	κ = .74
The hostile intruder	κ = .81
Taking back control	κ = .79
Taking back the money	κ = .76
The innocent victim	κ = .86

Win-win	κ = .7
Panta Rhei	κ = 0
The welfare gap	κ = .65

2.4 Results

2.4.1 Study 1: An overview of the frames

Four frames and four counter-frames were reconstructed based on the inductive framing analysis (see Appendix A). Three frames can be placed on a continuum of feelings of threat, where the focus alters: an economic, cultural or security threat. One frame, *Taking back control,* perceives the inefficient management as a threat, rather than migration in itself. Each frame and counter-frame will be further substantiated based on quotes from the analysis material.

Clash of civilisations. The first frame captures the saying by Huntington (1993) discussing the conflict between Western and non-Western civilisations. This frame demands assimilation and adjustment to Western values. Focus is on Islam, "a violent ideology, averse to everything our society believes in"[5] (Extreme-right politician Filip Dewinter cited on Sceptr, 2018). The 'us' versus 'them' paradigm is frequently used in this frame. *Clash of civilisations* contains a spectrum, going from a mild discomfort – "I think all migrants can hold on to their culture in Belgium […] But I don't want to adjust to *their* habits" (Clabots, 2015) – to a defensive, conflict oriented mind set – "Banning Black Pete, headscarves behind the counter, halal-meals at school, importing foreign conflicts, homophobia, losing equality between man and woman" (Extreme rightwing party Vlaams Belang, 2019).

The hostile intruder. This frame is based on emotions of fear. It stands for the perspective from which 'strangers' are seen as intruders who form a threat to society. According to this frame, Belgium is battling illegal migration, typified by defensive terms such as "a battlefield on our parking lots" (right-wing politician Theo Francken quoted in Belga, 2018) or creating a "fortress with double defence lines at each side" (Goethals, 2019). Illegal newcomers are seen as criminals who are fleeing their homelands justice system (Twitter,

[5] Excerpts from the data are based on authors' translation.

2019c). These “potential rapists” and “terrorists” form a security threat and should be stopped at the outer borders of the European Union. A robust security apparatus needs to filter the dangerous elements out of the invading group.

Taking back control. The third frame questions the chaotic, uncontrolled influx of migrants in Western Europe. Lack of international cooperation, inefficient regulations and widespread distrust cause an “unbounded tsunami” of people. This third frame manages a rational language and is based on reason and to a lesser extent on emotion, opposed to the two previous frames. Water-metaphors are widely used, confirming the feeling of powerlessness (e.g. ‘flood’, ‘migration wave’, ‘immigration taps’). The “absurdity” of the “illegal-carousel” (Bervoet, 2018), where migrants are arrested by police only to be released a few hours later, and repeat the entire administrative procedure the next day, needs to be replaced by a pragmatic and resolute migration policy with an “equal distribution of burdens” across borders.

Taking back the money. The last frame problematizes migration from a rational economic perspective, defining migrants and refugees as profiteers of the Western economical “paradise”. All newcomers are offered unconditional financial and material support upon arrival, while local vulnerable people and *real* refugees are struggling to make ends meet. The mapping of the cost of immigration uncovers an unfair balance and system that stimulates unproductive behaviour. The rumour of “free money” (Twitter, 2019b) spreads rapidly in poorer countries, motivating migration. To stop these “strangers disguised as refugees to take advantage of the welfare without contributing to it” (Umar, 2018) refugees and migrants need to vouch for their own maintenance and contribute to the local economy.

The innocent victim. This first emotional counter-frame deproblematizes migration by defining migrants and refugees as people in need. Running from prosecution, war violence or poverty, they have left their home country in search of a better life, a safe haven. In this counter-frame, the focus is on the cruel circumstances endured at home as well as while travelling to Europe: “horrors in the home country, rape, kidnapping, torture in Libya, shipwrecks and mortal fears on the Mediterranean Sea” (Raspoet, 2019). Often, personal stories are told to show the person behind the nameless numbers. Migrants are thus “helpless creatures” in need of financial, material and psychological support upon arrival.

Win-win. Based on an economic logic, the second counter-frame views migration as an opportunity. The competences and skills of young, active migrants might be a solution to the shortage of professionals, the aging population and a support to the welfare state. At the

same time, the workers obtain means to support their families at home. Immigration has been an "economic gain for the Belgian state" (Facebook, 2018). Typical for these counter-frame are economic terms as reference to people, e.g. 'labour reserve', 'new human resources', and a focus on people solely as labour providers. *Win-win* advocates a thought-through migration policy where people are admitted based on their labour skills and the needs on the job market.

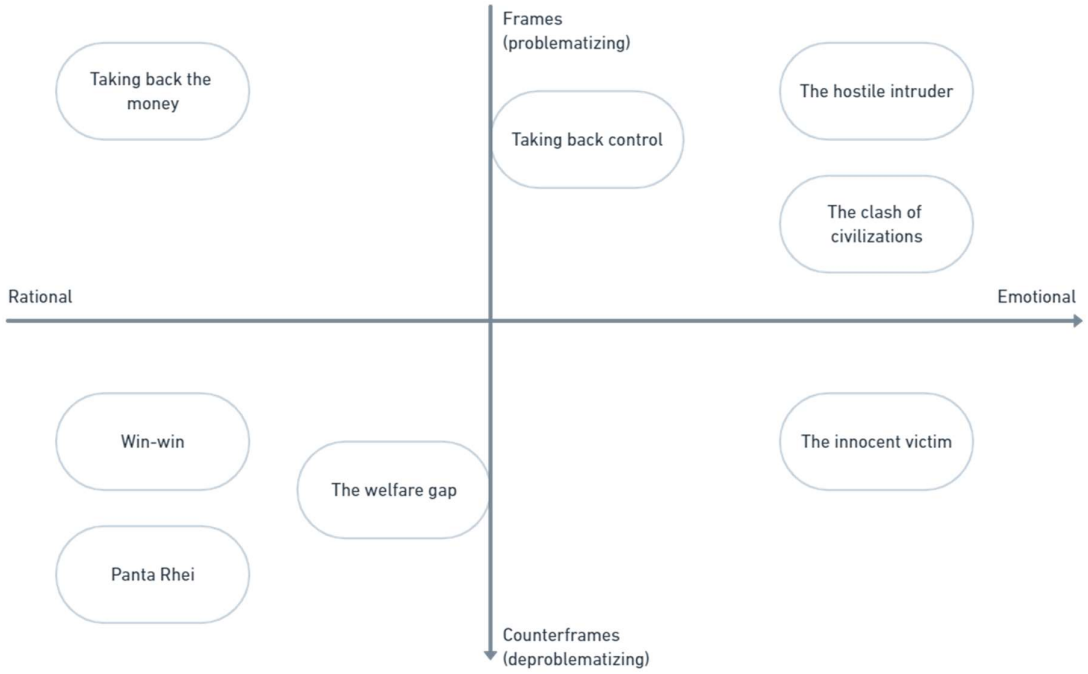
Panta Rhei. The philosophical thought 'Panta Rhei' of eternal, constant change shows that refugees and migration are hardly a recent phenomenon. Every form of cohabitation changed through the years, and equally, the current structure of societies is not eternal. "Migration is a natural thing, and the earth belongs to everyone" (Koenzel, 2019), thus people have always moved places to start new life elsewhere. According to this counter-frame, it is thus naïve to consider this movement stoppable. A historical perspective shows that all populations are descendants of migrants, showing that migration rarely is an issue when considered in the longer term. *Panta Rhei* thus strives to accept changes, movements and thus migration without condition, as they are part of the course of history.

The welfare gap. The final counter-frame brings in a diachronic perspective, by directing attention towards the "unequal welfare divide between North and South" (Goossens & Goethals, 2018). For centuries, the Western countries have "exploited" countries in the Global South for, among others, raw materials and cheap labour, to build their own welfare and power position. As long as this "structural injustice" has not been "rectified", and the colonial history has not been acknowledged, people will be forced to migrate to "richer" places. Guaranteeing a decent income for labour, ending the "theft" of raw materials and the "dumping" of waste are minimal first steps in bettering the situation.

As presented in Figure 1, the frames and counter-frames vary on an emotional and rational basis. Three (counter-)frames make use of a rational, logic reasoning to explain migration: *Taking back the money, Win-win* and *Panta Rhei.* Emotion is still present in the other frames (e.g. injustice in the *Taking back the money* frame), however, they are based on ratio. *The welfare gap* and *Taking back control* are situated on the midline of the axes. Whereas *The welfare gap* explains migration in a rational manner—an unbridgeable economic gap—at the same time, it tries to evoke emotions of connection between people on different sides of the gap. In the same way, *Taking back control* argues that migration is a controllable movement if handled efficiently, while touching upon feelings of powerlessness. On the emotional extreme, three (counter-)frames are situated: *The hostile intruder, The clash of civilisations* and

The innocent victim. As such, the frames can be categorised based on their argumentations on intense feelings of either threat or injustice.

Figure 1 A categorisation of the problematizing frames and deproblematizing counter-frames based on the focus of emotion versus ratio.



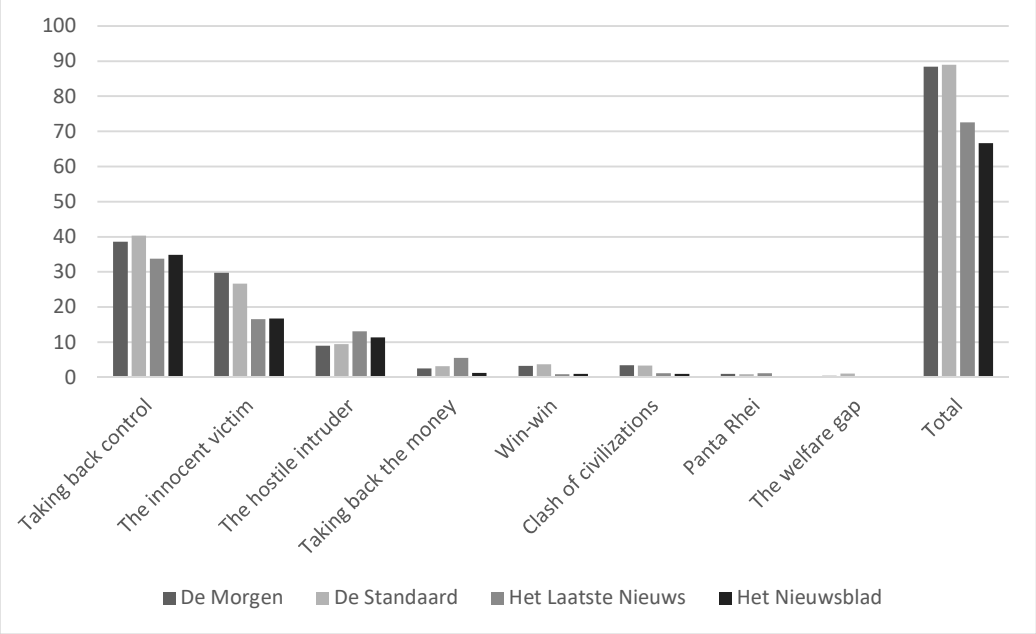
2.4.2 Study 2: The level of frame application in Flemish media

The deductive analysis shows that the quality newspapers cover the topic of ‘migration’ and ‘refugees’ more intensively than popular newspapers. *De Standaard* (*N*=8,400) and *De Morgen* (*N*=6,182) had more attention for the topics in the period 2015-2020 than the newspapers *Het Nieuwsblad* (*N*=3,227) and *Het Laatste Nieuws* (*N*=4,383). Only in 4.7% of the entire sample (*N*=2,166) a refugee or first-generation migrant was quoted.

Presence of frames in the sample

Figure 2 shows the presence of eight frames in a representative sample of 2,166 articles in the four newspapers under scrutiny. In 82.3% of the articles, at least one frame was recognized. Thus, nearly 18 per cent of the articles is frameless, or at least they do not contain one of the eight reconstructed frames. The main explanation here is that these articles did not focus explicitly on migration or refugees, but simply included the terms in another context.

Figure 2 The share (%) of total published articles in the reporting of migration and refugees that use one of the eight indicated frames and counter-frames in the reporting of migration and refugees in four Flemish newspapers (De Standaard, De Morgen, Het Laatste Nieuws and Het Nieuwsblad) between July 2014 and July 2019.



Taking back control is the most dominant frame (37.8%) in the sample, followed by *The innocent victim* (24.1%) and *The hostile intruder* (10.4%). The seven other frames only appear in less than 4% of all analysed articles. The analysis reveals that almost half of all the articles was based on solely one frame (49.2%), which can be either be a frame or a counter-frame. The majority of these articles were based on a problematizing frame; when only one perspective was presented, it mostly was a problematizing view on migration and refugees. The quality newspapers *De Standaard* (18,2% of the articles) and *De Morgen* (17,2%) contained more frames compared to popular newspapers *Het Nieuwsblad* (7,6%) and *Het Laatste Nieuws* (11,1%). Furthermore, all four newspapers use an equal amount of problematizing frames (an average of 48,5% of the articles), whereas *De Standaard* and *De Morgen* use more deproblematizing perspectives (respectively in 37,9% of the articles and 27,9% of the articles). One reason for this is that there were significantly more interviews in the two quality newspapers (5,69%) than the popular newspapers (1,08%). Interviews depend on who is given voice, however, it allows for alternative views to outside the dominant perspective to be quoted.

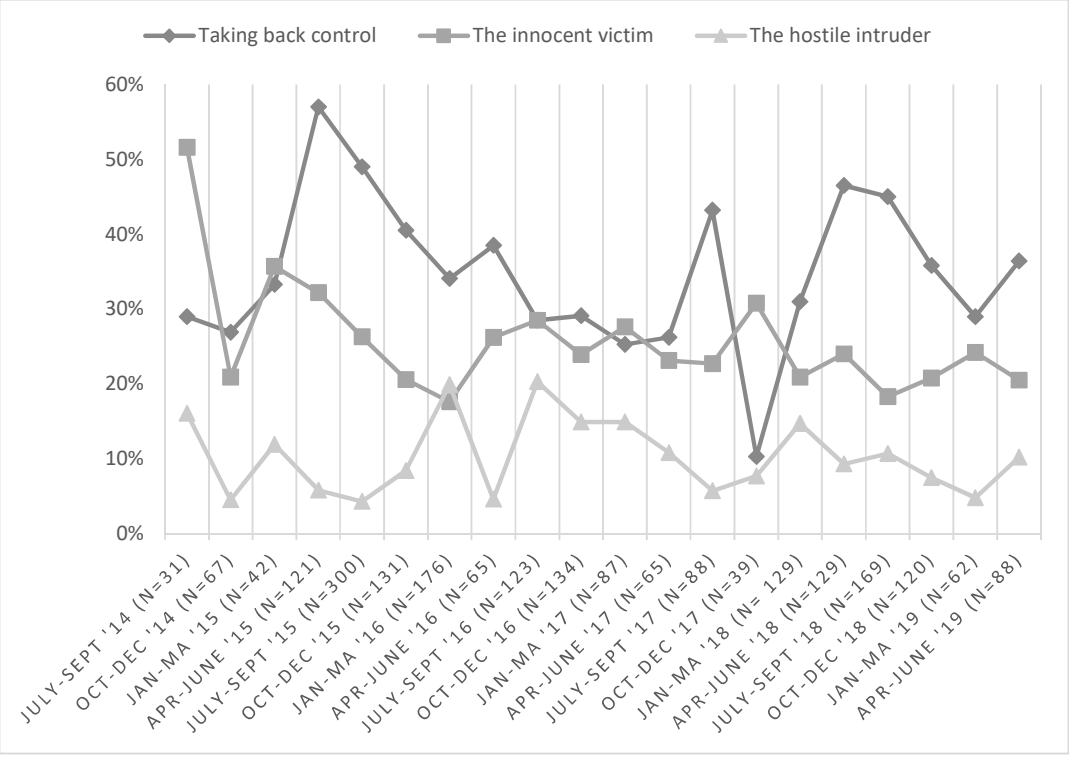
A comparison in the frame use in the four newspapers (see Figure 2) indicates four conclusions. First of all, the quality newspapers *De Standaard* (26,9%) and *De Morgen* (29,8%) make more use of *The innocent victim* counter-frame, $\chi^2 = 36{,}237$; $p < .001$. *De Standaard* (3,8%) uses the *Win-win*-frame more than *Het Laatste Nieuws* (0,9%), $\chi^2 = 13{,}381$, $p < .01$.

This popular newspaper makes more use of the *Taking back the money* frame (5,6%) than the other popular newspaper in this sample, *Het Nieuwsblad* (1,3%), $\chi^2 = 12{,}211$; $p < .01$.

Framing migration and refugees during key events

Over a five years period, key events indicate spikes in certain frame use, as presented in Figure 3. The results show that at the time of the *Charlie Hebdo* terrorist attack (January 2015), the frames *Taking back control* and *The hostile intruder* appeared more often. Before the passing of Alan Kurdi and the mediatisation of his death (September 2015), the use of *The innocent victim* counter-frame was rising. In the months leading up to this moment, many boats capsized and many lives were lost at sea. Shortly after his death, the use of this counter-frame declined and *Taking back control* peaked. In January 2016, there was a rise in *The hostile intruder* frame-use, as articles link refugees to the sexual harassment on New Year’s Eve, 2015 in Cologne. After the terrorist attacks in Brussels in 2016, a hasty decline of *The innocent victim* is reported.

Figure 3 The use of the frames Taking back control and The hostile intruder and the counter-frame The innocent victim in articles on refugees and migration in De Standaard, De Morgen, Het Nieuwsblad and Het Laatste Nieuws (July 2014 - July 2019).



2.5 Discussion

This study looked into the different perspectives on migration and refugees in Flanders public debate and how these (counter-)frames appear in Flemish media. The presented frame overview enlarges the current academic debate in three ways. Firstly, the presented overview offers generic frames rather than issue-specific frames, providing a complete set of frames. The reconstructed (counter-)frames are not solely applicable to the issue of migration and refugees, but represent archetypes or socially shared values that can be applied to other societal issue. Secondly, the frame matrix displays a complete logical reasoning for each frame, indicating reasoning and framing devices. Thirdly, the debate is broadened by bringing attention to equally problematizing frames and deproblematizing counter-frames. There remain several limitations, which are addressed further.

Responding to the first research question, four frames and four counter-frames have been reconstructed that complete the image of the complex reality of migration over a narrowed victim-intruder vision. This overview presents a more broad picture than earlier typologies (e.g., De Cleen et al., 2017; Ramasubramanian & Miles, 2018; Roggeband & Vliegenthart, 2007). Counter-frames that are obscured in the public debate, such as *The welfare gap* and *Panta Rhei* touch upon essential aspects in the debate, namely the historic perspective as well as root causes of migration. These perspectives help understand the motivation of migration and can help stimulate a constructive debate as the combination of frames and counter-frames goes beyond a focus on an outcome – migration – but brings in a holistic view.

Looking at the second research question, the prevalence of frames and counter-frames in the debate, there is a significant dominance of three frames: *Taking back control, The hostile intruder* and *The innocent victim,* which indicates a little nuanced public debate. Moreover, in a substantial part of the newspaper articles in the sample, only one frame is presented. This indicates a lack of nuance. Multiple frames offer a variety of perspectives, giving the reader a broader insight in the issue presented. The quality newspapers *De Standaard* and *De Morgen* touched upon more frames in their news articles than the popular newspapers, while they also published more on the topic in general. However, the presence of more frames might be a consequence of the first newspapers publishing longer articles than the latter. The method did not allow for a substantiated comparison based on article length; however, the coders identified a clear difference in article length between both sets.

The third research question, on the changing framing in relation to key events, is positively evaluated in the sense that frame use does deem to alter in relation to key events. Focusing on the three dominant frames in Flemish public debate, these show a dynamic presence with fluctuating dominance. Not only terrorist attacks, but also the loss of lives interact with frame change. These results are in line with earlier content analysis indicating peak attention periods (e.g., De Cock et al., 2019).

These results call for multiple reflections. A first reflection is that problematizing does not equal problematic. Not all problematizing frames should be avoided, nor are all deproblematizing counter-frames positive. The overview goes beyond a positive-negative representation of migration. Thus, from a normative perspective, it is not that frames are wrong and counter-frames are good. The normative stance from this study is rather that a combined use of multiple frames and counter-frames is preferred. Firstly, because it, despite unavoidable shortcomings, closest approaches reality and secondly, because it enables a nuanced and balanced representation of the topic.

Here follows an illustration of such shortcomings, and potentially problematic deproblematizing counter-frames. *The hostile intruder* frame is intertwined with a racial perspective on who is welcome in the country and who is not. The *Clash of civilisations* frame and *The hostile intruder* frame are closely linked with the framing of Muslims, where since 9/11, perceived Arab and Muslim minorities are portrayed as monolithic, threatening, associated with terrorism and barbaric habits (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017; Bakali, 2016). Not only the problematizing frames, but also the deproblematizing counter-frames can have problematic aspects. The *Innocent victim* counter-frame calls for solidarity and action to support people in need. In the same vein, it depicts migrants and refugees as incapable of being self-supportive and thus as helpless people. It can be an infantilizing perspective, taking away independence and feelings of self-worth with people in these situations. Audiences have perceived this perspective as manipulative (Haw, 2021) since the counter-frame connects to *Taking back the money,* as focusing on helping implies spending money. *The innocent victim* frame is thus a counter-frame, but a problematic one.

Similar shortcomings can be found with the dominant *Taking back control*-frame (37.8%). This problematizing frame focuses on feasibility. On the one hand, *Taking back control* calls for a so-called humane approach, while not neglecting a country’s own needs and thus imposing a restrictive policy. As such, it was a much-appreciated perspective from experts

on either side of the political spectrum during the member-check interviews. The dominant presence of the frame in the sample might indicate that journalists consider this frame as a midway in the dichotomy. On the other hand, the word use (e.g. water metaphors) is dehumanizing, shaping an image of an uncontrollable, homogeneous flood.

Similarly, when looking for an alternative discourse outside this dichotomy, *Win-win* aims to draw attention to the economic benefits migration can offer to the host country as well as to the migrating person. At the same time, *Win-win* holds in itself a superiority view on migrants, where these newcomers are 'welcomed' to perform tasks that current inhabitants of the country are unwilling to fulfil, as they are seen as demeaning. Still, a form of gratitude is expected, considering the 'opportunity' to support their families financially. This perspective makes way for a system of exploitation. Other counter-frames, such as *The welfare gap* and *Panta Rhei,* might carry a certain amount of vagueness, abstract and idealism.

A second reflection lies with this idea of gratitude, which is subtly present in each (counter-)frame except one. It is expected of refugees and migrants to be grateful for the space they are *given* in the *host* country. Even if newcomers are not perceived as threatening, there are conditions attached to their acceptance: they have to be grateful. Refugees and migrants are expected to shake of their identity and immerse in the new place. Within the *Innocent victim* counter-frame, the help offered to migrants and refugees might be seen as an act of heroism and something to be praised for, and not a legal nor moral obligation. Additionally, people praising refugees for making their country better give the idea that only thriving people are deserving of a safe haven, implying that mediocrity is not allowed when you have fled your country. It is only the *Panta Rhei* counter-frame that considers movement and migration as a normal event and as such expects no explanation nor submissive behaviour by the persons migrating. This concept of gratitude and mediocrity closely relates to the division of people in deserving and undeserving migrants (Dhaliwal & Forkert, 2015; Mügge & van der Haar, 2016) as through gratitude a distinction is made between good and bad migrants, i.e., the grateful and ungrateful ones, and the valuable and invaluable ones. The distinction made by the participants in the member-check interviews between refugees as victims and migrants as non-victims can be read in the same light. Through their victimhood, refugees gain the right for protection, which migrants lack. Some would oppose this concept of gratitude, stating that letting people in need find a safe place in a host country to build a new life does not oblige them to any debt to repay nor a lifetime of gratitude and labelling as 'refugee'. Others see gratitude as an essential and logical aspect of migration, focusing on the commitment of host countries.

A third reflection is that the presence of mostly right-centred perspectives might be connected to the political landscape in Flanders. The electoral dominance of right-wing political parties with a focus on migration, for example, through the position of Secretary of State of Asylum and Migration, perspectives from this side of the political spectrum might be more present in the Flemish media. As these political parties represent a substantial part of the electorate, and as migration is a central theme in the party vision, their vision on migration might be pushed in the media landscape. The results can be an indication that non-governmental organizations or other actors, who are believed to use more left-wing perspectives, are less covered.

There are three limitations to consider. First, coding deframes, the denouncement of frames, proved a complex case. In cases of doubt, the deframe was considered non-present and as these were often subtly present, more often than not this box was not checked. The audience interaction with deframes can differ compared to frames, as the argument is questioned. However, deframing relies on comparable vocabulary and cites the frames argumentation, and thus might reinforce the frames perspective (Vyncke, 2020).

Second, two counter-frames, *Panta Rhei* and *The welfare gap* did not meet the norm for intercoder reliability. Due to the small number of articles that contained these frames, the challenge for reliable coding increased, considering how Cohen’s Kappa is calculated (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). The results of the deductive analysis of these counter-frames should thus be considered carefully. The overall conclusion, however, remains that these are rarely used in Flemish media.

Third, the inability to include the number of words and actors as a factor is a final limitation. This inclusion would have allowed for more substantial analysis on the connection between frame presence and length of article, in line with De Cock, Sundin and Mistiaen (2019). The coders did notice *Het Laatste Nieuws* publishing shorter articles, and would in future research include this aspect. Additionally, including the actors (ergo, who is speaking) would allow for linking the frame use to, for example, politicians, academics or non-governmental organizations.

Future research can build further on the results showing that only a limited amount of frames is present in Flemish media. By linking this data to actors and the political landscape, more insight is gained in who is given voice, as only in 4.7% of the data refugees and migrants are cited. The use of a combination of frames and counter-frames is advised, considering it

presents a more complete picture of the complex reality. Building further on research on frame-building (e.g., Boesman et al., 2017), it can be investigated why certain frames are selected and how to broaden the frame use.

Looking at the social construction of migration and refugees, there are final societal considerations to be made interpreting these results. The dominant presence of problematizing frames or problematic counter-frames contributes to the shaping of a dangerous, non-independent outsider, which might have long-term implications. The perception of a depending person can lead to continued pampering and lack of opportunities due to a victim-position. Additionally, policy decisions, such as the creation of Camp Moria, but also humiliating questioning during an asylum process or man hunting so-called transmigrants fit within an intruder framework. The discard of human rights, for example through police brutality towards asylum seekers, contradicts declared European values. As such, the social construction of the other is connected to the construction of an image of the self (Bogaert, 2021; Brons, 2015; van Houtum, 2021).

Chapter 3. The framing of radicalisation in the Belgian societal debate: A contagious threat or youthful naivety? [6]

Following the terrorist attacks of 13 November 2015 in Paris and 22 March 2016 in Brussels, radicalisation has become the topic of lively debate in Belgium. However, little research has been done on the different perspectives that people use to communicate about radicalisation in Belgium. Therefore, an inductive framing analysis of 2,271 excerpts, taken from various newspaper articles, policy documents and social media, was performed to reconstruct precisely all the frames and counter-frames that are used to define the issue. The results were validated through seven interviews and two workshops with a variety of stakeholders (imams, youth workers, academics, journalists). This resulted in the reconstruction of four problematizing frames and eight deproblematizing counter-frames. In addition to presenting and illustrating these frames, this chapter discusses how the framing analysis can help gain insight into the social construction of radicalisation in the wake of the 2015 and 2016 terrorist attacks.

[6] This chapter has been published: Figoureux, M. & Van Gorp, B. (2020). The framing of radicalisation in the Belgian societal debate: A contagious threat or youthful naivety? *Critical Studies on Terrorism, 13*(2), 237-357.

3.1 Introduction

Following 9/11 and the ensuing War-on-Terror, Muslim representation in the Western media shifted towards a security perspective (Poole, 2011), framing Muslims more often as terrorists (Kanji, 2018). This chapter contributes to this discussion in two ways: on the one hand by focusing on the discursive construction of 'radicalisation' by providing insight into the framing of radicalisation – often understood as a possible pre-phase to terrorism - while providing alternative interpretations of the term. On the other hand, this paper hones in on the Belgian context, specifically the 2016 terrorist attacks and the link established between the Brussels municipality of Molenbeek and the Paris attacks of 2015.

The term radicalisation originally gained usage within European police and intelligence circles shortly after the 9/11 attacks, simply meaning "anger" (Coolsaet, 2016a, p. 3). To be radical means, "to be extreme relative to something that is defined or accepted as normative, traditional, or valued as the status quo" (Mandel, 2009, p. 105). In general, radicalisation is understood as a process by which an individual or group comes to adopt increasingly more extreme political, social or religious ideals and aspirations that reject or undermine the status quo (Wilner & Dubouloz, 2010). Starting in 2004–2005, following the attacks in Madrid and London by home-grown terrorists, the term suddenly gained widespread popularity; both in policy documentation (Kundnani, 2012) and in the media (Hörnqvist & Flyghed, 2012). However, radicalisation soon became a catch-all concept (Ducol, 2015), used to refer to "everything that happens before the bomb goes off" (Neumann, 2008, p. 4). Over the years, the meaning of the term narrowed down to "a new lens through which to view Muslim minorities" (Kundnani, 2012, p. 3), and Muslim-danger (Fadil, 2017).

As Croft (2012) argued, this securitisation of the other (e.g., "the Muslim") deeply affects social interactions and everyday life. The surveillance of Muslims is then a valid attempt to control potential security threats (Awan et al., 2011). Additionally, news media treat radicalisation and Muslims as a menace to the West (Silva, 2017) which, together with the politicization of religion, might lead to impoverishments of the community, evoking resentful feelings and consequently possibly prompting radicalisation (Cesari, 2010). Hence, the debate on radicalisation might radicalise.

The reasons for this radicalisation and possible solutions to the problems caused by it are the subject of societal debate (for an overview, see Borum, 2011; Schmid, 2013). Due to

the lack of consensus on the definition of radicalisation, the meaning varies along with the spokesperson. Whereas academics are generally focused on exposing the determining causes for radicalisation, as well as possible prevention tools, this chapter looks at the discursive construction of radicalisation (Wood & Kroger, 2000). Through the collective use of language, a reality emerges out of social interaction. The first aim is thus to determine *all* prevailing frames in the current public debate in Belgium about radicalisation, while the second aim is to identify alternative ways of communication. To achieve these goals, an inductive framing analysis, based on a varied set of data consisting of news media, policy documents, online fora and social media, is performed.

3.2 Literature review

3.2.1 Radicalisation, extremism, terrorism?

Despite the attention radicalisation has received in the academic world, there is no consensus on what radicalisation is, as well as what the dynamics between radicalisation, (violent) extremism and terrorism are (RAN, 2016). As Schmid (2013, p. 5) points out: "The concept of radicalisation is by no means as solid and clear as many seem to take for granted". The vagueness of the issue is a strong argument for why it is relevant to disentangle the different viewpoints on radicalisation.

An initial distinction can be made between cognitive and violent radicalisation (Vidino, 2010). The first deals with the process of adopting ideas that differ from the mainstream, whereas the second implies the additional step of using violence (Vidino, 2010). Other scholars also argued that socialisation on a behavioural level is necessary for a definition of radicalisation (e.g., della Porta & LaFree, 2012). More distinctions have been made between radicalisation taking place on an individual, group or societal level (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008) and between violent and non-violent radicalisation (Bartlet & Miller, 2012). Reinares and colleagues (2008) argued that radicalism in itself does not lead to violence, but can also strive for social or political change. Another ground for discussion is the role of theology, in regards to which Roy (2005) drew attention to political rather than theological radicalisation.

Different models have been developed to map the path towards radicalisation (Borum, 2011; Feddes et al., 2016; Hafez & Mullins, 2015). For example, Moghaddam's (2005) 'staircase to terrorism' model indicated radicalisation as a pre-phase. Kundnani (2012, p. 4) claimed that "the concept of radicalisation emerged as a vehicle for policy-makers to explore

the process by which a terrorist was made and to provide an analytical grounding for preventative strategies that went beyond the threat of violence or detention". Radicalisation is consequently seen as the "holy grail of counterterrorism" (Coolsaet, 2016a, p. 4). Lynch (2013) pointed out that by linking radicalisation and terrorism to Muslim youth in Europe, as seen with the rise of the Islamic State, the concepts are intertwined with ideas on multiculturalism, identity, integration and segregation. The radicalisation, extremism and terrorism debate must thus be viewed in the larger societal context.

3.2.2 Framing of radicalisation

Considering that, there is no consensus on the relation between radicalisation, extremism and terrorism, this chapter focuses on the different *framings* of radicalisation, while exploring which frames and counter-frames link radicalisation to extremism and terrorism. Framing is the dynamic process where the meanings of complex, social issues come about. There are, however, almost as many definitions of framing as researchers studying it (see for example Iyengar, 2005; Scheufele, 1999). A specific definition, adhered to in this dissertation, is the one from Reese (2001, p. 5): "Frames are organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world". In other words, frames are steadfast perspectives or viewpoints that can be used to structure reality in a meaningful way. Depending on the definition of the problem, the offered solutions will be different (Entman, 1993). As a result, and on the one hand, a frame has to be perceived as a perspective on radicalisation that defines it in a problematizing manner. On the other hand, if a frame defines radicalisation as less or not at all problematic, it is referred to here as a counter-frame. In other words, viewed from a frame, radicalisation is perceived as a problem and viewed from a counter-frame it is not, or to a lesser degree, problematic.

Frames help to understand "what is going on". Facts do not stand on their own, but gain meaning by being embedded in a narrative. Frames are mutually shared in society and therefore they feel familiar. Their persistent and stable character assures that they play an important role in communication, even more so when people are talking about social issues. However, their familiarity and constancy might be the reason that they are not recognised as 'frames'. Therefore, a framing analysis can help to make them visible and tangible. Hence, the first research question is:

RQ1: What are the problematizing frames in the social debate on radicalisation in Belgium?

Although the purpose here is to reconstruct frames that give meaning to a specific issue, they are not issue-specific frames (de Vreese, 2005). Every frame is generic to a certain extent: every issue can be framed in different ways and every frame can be used to give meaning to different issues. Brugman, Burgers and Steen (2017) claimed that people need a set of conceptual metaphors to think and talk about abstractions. More abstract concepts can only be conceived by means of more concrete concepts (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Metaphors summarise a complex issue and create a comprehensible narrative; the metaphors as such can be seen as templates to help understand new social problems and proposed solutions (Lau & Schlesinger, 2005). The receiver is thus already familiar with the ideas presented (Van Gorp, 2007b).

Radicalisation is a particularly relevant issue for the application of a framing analysis. On the one hand, a broad range of frames is needed in order to explain what radicalisation is, and, on the other hand, there is the observation that it is difficult to point out an empirical reality that corresponds to the notion of 'radicalisation'. Different stakeholders, such as academics, police or youth workers seem to define radicalisation differently. What some people see as radicalisation, others refute. For example, for some, the strong dedication to religion might be a sign of radicalisation, while for others this is not radicalisation, but rather an attempt to find meaning in life.

If an empirical reality is largely missing, then a concept such as radicalisation can be seen as *a social construct* that takes shape in an interactive process of constructing a shared meaning (Burr, 2015). In line with Hewer and Taylor (2007), this study builds further on elements of social constructionism and social representations theory (Farr & Moscovici, 1984). These social representations are then capable of influencing the behaviour of individuals, the representations themselves a product of people's actions and communications. According to Bugden, Evensen and Stedman (2017) both framing and social representations theory state that meaning is created when an issue is connected, via media coverage for example, to pre-existing mental constructs. In this context, the framing of radicalisation plays an even bigger role. After all, every frame results in a different definition of the phenomenon, in which the causes, consequences, solutions and moral judgements can fundamentally alter (Entman, 1993). Especially when there is interest in formulating a solution for radicalisation, it is necessary to disentangle the different frames of the concept.

Furthermore, framing results in a simplification of reality. According to Entman (1991), the essence of framing is sizing: magnifying or shrinking elements of the depicted reality to make them more or less salient. This might create a shortcoming: the frame that simplifies the most might receive the most recognition, since it offers a somewhat black-and-white definition of reality. More complex frames are more difficult to convey. Rather, it is the combination of different perspectives that offer insight into the complexity of the phenomenon. Two framing strategies can solve this issue: the combination of different frames and the use of counter-frames. By combining different frames, one looks at the concept from different viewpoints. This sheds light on the broader complexity at work, bringing more nuances to the surface. This study will map both problematizing frames and deproblematizing counter-frames. The second research question is thus:

RQ2: What are possible counter-frames in the communication on radicalisation in Belgium?

Previous research on the framing of "Syria fighters" in Flanders and the Netherlands (Berbers et al., 2016), has reconstructed five frames. Two of them, the terrorist and victim, problematize the issue. The three others, "martyr", "Don Quixote" and "adventurer", deproblematize the concept of Syria fighters. The counter-frames also demonstrate the popular juxtaposition of "one person's terrorist is the other person's freedom fighter" (Hörnqvist & Flyghed, 2012, p. 320). Previous research analysed how the frame building of Syria fighters developed in Flanders and found that the framing of new events stems from familiar frames on related events, for example the "Arab Spring frame", where the fight against al-Assad was presented as a legitimate one (Boesman et al., 2017). In sum, it is particularly relevant to get an idea of what the different frames circulating in the societal debate on current topics such as radicalisation are, considering the convincing literature on framing in the media and its effect on the public's attitude and opinions (for an overview, see for example Lecheler & de Vreese, 2019).

3.3 Methodology

3.3.1 Sample

The frames were reconstructed by performing an inductive framing analysis (see Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Matthes & Kohring, 2008; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Van Gorp, 2010). The purposive sample of analysis material was collected mainly by using GoPress Academic, a news database. The material consists firstly of news articles and reports that deal with radicalisation published in popular and quality newspapers, news-websites and magazines

(such as De Standaard, De Morgen, Le Vif, Metro FR/NL, Le Soir) between January 2015 and February 2018. As such, the departure of so-called Syria fighters and the attacks in Paris in 2015 (connected to the Brussels municipality Molenbeek) and in Brussels in 2016 are included, as well as a significant period of time before and after these events. To ensure enough diversity, the sample was supplemented by a purposive sample of TV debates, radio programmes and documentaries. Besides traditional media and policy documents, Internet fora and social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook) were included in the sample. These were added to ensure the inclusion of non-dominant perspectives in the debate.

3.3.2 Analysis

In total, 267 publicly available texts were collected following a thematic analysis. The material was studied with an open mind and each meaningful text fragment or image related to radicalisation, offering an idea of the definition, causes, consequences, solutions or moral judgements was coded. Out of the 267 articles, 2721 excerpts were coded that contained *framing devices* (words, images, metaphors or arguments) (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989) that directly or indirectly referred to radicalisation, its causes, consequences, solutions and possibly moral judgments (*reasoning devices*). One newspaper article (Struys[7], 2017, own translations[8]), for instance, reported on radical detainees and the possibility that they could "contaminate" other prisoners. Some words indicated that it would be dangerous to place radical individuals with other "clean" detainees, considering it "a real risk for contamination". According to the article, the prisoners create a real problem when they "go back into society" and possibly "affect" the population at large. The proposed solution for "eliminating this contamination danger as much as possible", was to erect "isolated departments" for radicalised people, where they could be *deradicalised* before "safely" returning to society. All these separate text fragments were selected and coded so that they could be clustered in a subsequent phase.

The first phase continued until certain patterns became clear. For example, the word choice in the previous example indicated an interpretation of radicalisation as something contagious. Images and word choices with the same idea were then coded correspondingly.

Following the thematic analysis, the text fragments were axially coded. Based on the assigned codes and a comparison between the different coded fragments, the researchers linked

[7] If relevant, the background of the source of the citations will be clarified.
[8] It applies for the rest of the chapter that excerpts from the data are based on authors' translation.

the logically connected elements and formed patterns. This collection of reasoning and framing devices formed *frame packages* (Van Gorp, 2007a). The overarching idea that made the package into a coherent whole was the actual frame the researchers were seeking. When an excerpt was identified that was merely a repetition or variation of what was already included and described in the database, it was subsequently disregarded. The same applies to the saturation point at which a frame package was considered sufficiently substantiated. In that case, additional examples and repetitions were not further coded. This implies that sources that happened to be analysed at the beginning of the process are included in the database in a much denser and granular form than texts that were discussed later.

The reconstructed frame packages were placed into a *frame matrix* (see Appendix B). It shows how the different frames are related to each other. In this way, the researchers worked inductively and systematic towards a limited number of frame packages. The complete set of frames and counter-frames needed to cover every aspect of the issue (i.e., the criterion of being exhaustive), without the packages overlapping each other (i.e., the criterion of mutual exclusivity).

3.3.3 Validation

Once the frames were constructed and described in a frame matrix, an additional analysis cycle was used to sort all excerpts according to the frame typology. If an excerpt could not be placed within the typology, it pointed towards an unidentified frame or an article without a frame. Once all excerpts could be classified within the typology, the reconstructed frames were considered to be reliably coded. However, the use of frames and the exercise implemented to identify them unambiguously and reliably are grounds for discussion. This aspect may be comforting, as it relates to the fact that a frame is only an *invitation* to look at reality in a specific way. Ultimately, however, it is necessary to validate the frames sufficiently that have been identified.

External validation is required to compensate for the researchers' backgrounds and preferences that inevitably influence their interpretations (Van Gorp, 2010). To eliminate subjectivity from the researchers, seven face-to-face interviews were conducted: one with a youth worker in Brussels, a journalist from a cultural magazine, a director from a high school dealing with radicalisation, an academic in the field of international politics focusing on radicalisation, two academics in the field of philosophy who advocate opposing views in the public debate and a lecturer on polarisation and radicalisation. Additionally, two focus groups

were formed with three framing scholars, one radicalisation and media scholar, the spokesperson from a local mosque, a freelance journalist writing primarily for a current-affairs magazine, a journalist from a quality newspaper and two youth workers from Brussels. In these focus groups, the participants debated on the credibility of the frames, as well as to what degree these frames were perceived to be recognisable and usable. The overarching naming of the frames was also discussed.

3.4 Results

3.4.1 The radicalisation problem

Four problematizing frames were reconstructed, as presented in Appendix B. They are discussed one by one, to indicate their differences, illustrated with excerpts from the sample.

The first problematizing frame is *A criminal career*. This refers to the process where a person starts with petty theft but turns into a real gangster. *A criminal career,* unlike the other frames, focuses on the individual aspect in the radicalisation process. People "enter prison as a drugs dealer or car thief and leave as terrorists" (Hussey [historian] in Arijs, 2017). The "young people who are tired of their miserable lives as young delinquents get excited by the prospect of adventure and violence" (de Kerchove [European Coordinator for Counter-terrorism] in Antonissen, 2017a). This leads to the fact that "in a short period of time, young crooks turn into blinded murdering machines" (Vranckx, 2017). Faith or ideology are "added later to legitimise the acts" (Van San [researcher] in Pardoen, 2017). Viewed from this frame, since radicalisation is a "criminal phenomenon, we need to battle it through the means of democracy and state of law" (Van Leeuw [federal attorney] in Mulders, 2016).

The second, metaphorical frame is labelled *Virus*. A virus stands for a life-threatening, contagious disease that affects the body and needs to be treated. Like the first frame, *Virus* considers radicalisation to be a linear process. The frame can easily be recognised by words or metaphors that refer to a disease, such as "curing those ideas" (Verberckmoes, 2017), "symptoms of radicalisation" (Demeurisse, 2018) or "a cancer that is difficult to treat" (Jambon [former Belgian Minister of Internal Affairs] in Belga, 2016). The disease in this case in the collection of "contagious, poisonous ideas" (Damen [lawyer] in Van Gestel, 2017). Society needs to "keep a finger on the pulse" (Van Quickenborne [then mayor of Kortrijk] in Redactie K.W., 2018) and "isolate" (Van Poecke [director of Brussels prisons] in Justaert & Eeckhaut, 2017) the radicalised individuals. Viewed from this frame, it is important to "fight the

epidemic" (Ferguson, 2017), because it is the first step towards extremism and terrorism. An "antidote" (Vranckx, 2015) should "prevent relapses" (Vanhecke & Bergmans, 2017).

The third frame was identified as *Mutiny*. Mutiny is defined as the resistance of someone lower in rank against someone higher in the hierarchy. Just as *Virus,* this frame takes the societal level into account. *Mutiny* looks at radicalisation as a group's sudden revolt against the authorities due to feelings of being "excluded and neglected by society" (Hussey [historian] in Arijs, 2017) because "Belgium has nothing to offer them. There is discrimination, racism and no respect for a young Muslim migrant" (AlDe'emeh [researcher] in Rotthier, 2017). The "lack of prospects by the bad socio-economic situation" (Idrissi [politician] in Redactie De Morgen, 2017) makes them feel "unwelcome and as if the whole society is against them" (Antonissen, 2017b). Viewed from this frame, "radicalisation is a form of revenge" (Van Malderen, 2017).

Clash of civilisations, finally*,* is a frame from the viewpoint of a bystander who is looking at society from a distance. The saying was popularised by Samuel Huntington (1993) in his discussion of the conflict between Western and non-Western civilisations. According to this frame, radicalisation is interpreted as the aggressive behaviour one displays after being challenged by 'the Other'. The presence of "an Islamic ideology that is hostile towards Western and democratic values" (Belgian State Security, 2018) has turned Belgium into, according to this frame, "a repressive warfront, followed by fear and polarisation" (Ben Allal [journalist] in Vidal, 2018). Now, "two groups are facing each other with drawn knives" (Benhaddou [imam], 2016) , a fight of "good against evil" (De Sutter [political psychologist], 2015). In order to protect Western freedom, "Islam needs to be restricted" (Van Grieken [politician] in Brinckman, 2017).

3.4.2 Alternative views on radicalisation

Apart from the problematizing views, eight alternative counter-frames could be reconstructed, as presented in Appendix B. Although twice as many counter-frames were found, they were less present in the database. The frames led to more citations, whereas the counter-frames were found later in the coding process and were partly clarified only during the focus group and interview phase. The large number of counter-frames therefore does not mean that they dominate the debate. The counter-frames are ordered according to micro-, meso- or macro-level focus.

Puberty refers to the rebellious phase in life where young people provoke authority. Consequently, the *Puberty* frame defines radicalisation as (simply) a temporary stage of identity confusion and psychological searching that, with the passing of time, will fade. In terms of the individual, radical behaviour indicates "a search for identity" (Lesaffer, 2018). They are at "the age of looking for a strong engagement" (Van Leeuw [federal attorney] in Mulders, 2016). Moreover, this counter-frame refers to some biological factors as reasoning devices:

> Radicalisation mainly takes place in the developmental phase when young people between approximately 14 to 23 years are forming their identity. Due to brain development and body changes, during this phase in life, young people are struggling to make well-thought-out choices, they make risky choices, might be emotionally unreasonable and they quickly feel as if they are being attacked. (GO!, 2015)

It is then the "typical fuckyouism of adolescents, like the punks in the seventies were wearing swastikas, as a provocation" (Hussey [historian] in Arijs, 2017). Therefore, seen from the *Puberty* perspective, society needs to de-dramatize and realise that radicalisation is temporary.

Meaningfulness is another counter-frame, the definition of which does not begin with "Radicalisation is…" but rather "What other people label as radicalisation, is actually…" (see Appendix B). During the validation interviews, it became clear that the people who use this perspective reject the word 'radicalisation', which is considered unfit to describe reality.

From the viewpoint of *Meaningfulness*, radicalisation is the intense, personal experience of an ideology in a society "where religion is something inherently problematic" (Slaats [writer], 2017), where "people feel uncomfortable when young Muslims look for their religious roots" (Demir [professor of sociology] in Geeraert, 2017). An ideology or a religion answers the question "how do I live a good and pure life?" (Deprez [comedian], 2017). It also offers "a survival kit for postmodern times" (Benzine [political scientist] in Struys, 2017b). 'Radicalisation' should then not be seen as something threatening, but as a purpose in life. The following quote from the data further illustrates this idea:

> Two years ago, I switched schools because I put on a veil. And then, in the new school, a teacher put pressure on me because I started wearing a longer jellabiya, even though I was allowed to do so. […] I had to stay in a separate room, so the school administration could check if I was radicalised. This was ridiculous – these were people that have known me all my life! (Young girl from Molenbeek in EIP, 2017)

The *Penance* counter-frame refers to the effort to make up for past mistakes by undergoing a punishment. It is an individual's attempt to receive forgiveness from God through atonement. Considering radicalisation from this perspective, it is "a form of cleansing, saying that 'people

with the worst pasts sometimes have the most beautiful futures'" (Hamid, 2017). Faults like drug use, theft or even murder are a burden of guilt for the individual, who has gained insight into the wrong of his or her deeds. A desire to be forgiven drives these people, so they adopt a very pure lifestyle in order to set things right. This clear black-and-white interpretation of religion offers an element of stability in life and directs them in which path to follow. For individuals who have slipped off the 'right path' before, these guidelines of religion can be a source of comfort and certainty in a world full of temptations. Following the thinking pattern of *Penance*, being devoted to religion, is pushing oneself to the extreme to receive this forgiveness.

The freedom fighter is generally juxtaposed with 'the terrorist'. Depending on which side one is on, one is either a terrorist or a freedom fighter. In the second sense, the person is fighting for freedom for his or her country or people. *The freedom fighter* thus takes into account the broader geopolitical context:

> Through Al Jazeera, they are confronted with the war in Gaza on a daily basis. A lot of young Muslims feel more connected to suffering fellow believers than to non-Muslims in Belgium. They want to do something! (Stevens, 2016)

The sister of a radicalised Syria fighter explains her brothers' departure as such: "I think he saw Muslim children dying all over the world and wanted revenge. He saw the American bombings in Syria, and he wanted revenge" (Abedi [brother of a terrorist] in De Coninck, 2017). People who leave want to "help brothers and sisters in Syria" (Mazouz [mother of a jihadi] in Carpentier, 2018). They were leaving to "fight against President Assad. Some left out of discontent: the West did not give enough support to the Syrian Spring" (de Kerchove [European coordinator for counterterrorism] in Antonissen, 2017a). Fighting is encouraged and "obituaries of killed jihadi in Syria take the form of propaganda and hymns" (AlDe'emeh & Stockmans, 2015). A strong and coherent condemnation of the oppression of people and violation of human rights, independent of who the perpetrator is, given by the international community, could reinforce trust in the Western societies.

Resilience, situated on the meso-level, refers to a substance or object's ability to regain its former shape after being stretched or pushed. In view of this metaphor, radicalisation is the unexpected, temporary discharge of built-up energy and tensions experienced on both the social individual level. *Resilience* emphasises the fact that "this could be a ticking bomb, but it is not. It does not explode" (Renson, 2017), meaning that internal tensions are being absorbed. It is a challenge for both society and the individual to overcome struggles and find a way to stimulate

mutual rapprochement. Therefore "the Islamic identity needs to take shape in harmony with society, and not as a counter-reaction" (Demirkoparan [researcher] in Zuallaert, 2017).

An open mind stands for a willingness to approach other people and their ideas in an unprejudiced and open manner, even when they invoke fear. This means that "terrorists are also people" (Van Dongen, 2017). If they want to become a foreign fighter, "what is important is that the reason for their departure is noble" (Van Maele, 2017). The challenge presented by *An open mind* is "to be able to have mutual understanding for the other person's ideas" (Vergauwen, 2017). It is "a societal challenge to reach out a hand to someone who rejects everything you stand for" (Heremans [high school director in Antwerp] in De Afspraak, 2016). Therefore, "you need to make a step in the direction of the Other" (El Bachiri [indirect victim of terrorist attacks in Brussels, 2017).

Diversity looks at radicalisation from the macro-level. Like *Meaningfulness,* this counter-frame also refutes the word "radicalisation". As viewed from this frame, radical Islamism is one of the extremes of Islam, thus neglecting the middle of the spectrum of beliefs within Islam. According to *Diversity,* these extreme interpretations demand (and receive) a lot of attention but are not representative of the entire ideology or religion, because "someone who shouts very loudly in an otherwise quiet mass will always get attention" (Zain [musician] in Debusschere & Delputte, 2017). This perspective raises the question: "Are we really going to allow the overmediatization of a phenomenon that only concerns a very small minority of young people?" (L'observatoire, 2015). Society needs to realise that "it is not necessary to be afraid of a Salafist who behaves piously in a mosque the entire day and then quietly goes home. You do not need to go fishing in an ocean" (Aboutaleb [Dutch politician] in Schoofs, 2017). This counter-frame makes the comparison:

> Jihadi-Salafism relates to traditional Salafism just as violent white 'supremacists' like Anders Breivik relate to the classical extreme right or ultra-nationalist ideas of some political parties and anti-Muslim groups in Western European countries. (Bilal, 2015, p. 46)

The final alternative view of radicalisation was labelled *A catalyst*, an object known to accelerate or put things into motion. Radicalisation is therefore defined as the expression of fundamentally alternative ideas about society that have the potential to alter that society to its core. Viewed from this perspective, radicalisation is necessary in a dynamic democracy:

> I also want to emphasise that radicalism in itself is not a societal problem. Belgium was founded by a group of radicalised lawyers from Brussels and Liège. Vegetarians,

> protesters and human rights activists are all civilians that have been radicalised in some way. Society needs more of those radicals. (Zuallaert & Van Humbeeck, 2016)

Hence, some people are expressing a "plea for radicalisation" (Jahjah [Belgian opinion maker], 2016) since to "re-radicalise is better than to de-radicalise" (Stevens, 2016). It is the character of "a democracy to be flexible enough to cope with ideas that challenge the mainstream opinions" (Benhaddou [imam], 2016). Along with *Resilience, A catalyst* builds on the basic idea that radicalisation is a positive action. *Resilience* interprets radicalisation as the result of negative pressure on society and the individual, which can lead to a positive outburst.

3.5 Discussion

This chapter examined the Belgian societal debate on radicalisation from January 2015 to February 2018. It provides an overview of that debate by presenting both the frames and counter-frames commonly used in the Belgian public discourse on the topic. Although it is not possible to quantify, the coding process showed that the four problematizing frames were dominant when compared to the counter-frames, even if a higher quantity of counter-frames were found. The counter-frames emerged later in the coding process and sometimes required clarification from the focus groups and interviews, whereas the frames displayed a dominant presence in the database and offered more citations. However, considering the coding procedure of disregarding additional repeating devices once a saturation point was reached, it is not possible to make conclusive remarks on the extent to which particular sources (e.g., popular/qualitative newspapers) applied the frames in practice. In order to be able to do so, an additional quantitative, deductive analysis of the data is needed.

Some frames include elements such as 'sudden uprisings' (*Mutiny*) or a 'clash' (*Clash of civilisations*). In the counter-frames, radicalisation is regarded as a static concept rather than a process, for example as in the act of seeking forgiveness in the *Penance* counter-frame. In *Puberty* especially, when studying the phase characterised by searching for identity and testing boundaries, it is possible to see the inner dynamics of radicalisation. During the validation phase, apart from the frames and what can be found in the dataset, every interviewee mentioned the importance of viewing radicalisation as a process. Despite this consensus among academic literature and experts, the idea of a process is not reflected in most of the societal perspectives on radicalisation. This might be a consequence of media and policy managers needing to simplify ideas and provide clear-cut answers, whereas the idea of a process and the emergence of different building blocks are more complex concepts to bring across. The framing analysis

resulted in mainly metaphorical frames and counter-frames, as discussed by Brugman et al. (2017), which present the issue in a simplified form. Considering the elusiveness of the concept, the combination of frames and counter-frames is required to capture the complexity of radicalisation.

Furthermore, looking at the literature, several similarities can be identified. The distinction made between a focus on socio-economic circumstances and identity clashes (Hörnqvist & Flyghed, 2012) is reflected in the frames. *Mutiny* takes these circumstantial factors into account, however it also emphasises the subjective aspect: discussing *perceived* backlog and discrimination. In contrast, *Virus* and *Clash of civilisations* are much more focused on the aspects of ideology and identity. *Puberty* can be viewed as the social variant of what Sieckelinck et al. (2015) discussed: these authors focused attention on the pedagogical aspect and the importance of identity searching.

Additionally, there is some convergence with the frames on Syria fighters as reconstructed by Berbers and colleagues (2016), although that study did not focus on the issue of radicalisation. Ideas that are inherent to the 'martyr' frame (deciding to help brothers and sisters in Syria) are part of *The freedom fighter*. Considering the events leading up to the departure of the Syria fighters, and the terrorist attacks claimed by the Islamic State, the collected material reflected the prominence of *Islamic* radicalisation in the current Belgian societal debate. Just as Ruigrok and Van Atteveldt (2007) highlighted the link between Islam and terrorism in the media, the concepts of radicalisation and Islam also seemed to correspond. However, the analysis demonstrated that radicalisation involves more than just Islam, just as Islam involves more than radicalisation. For example, in Belgium, radicalised Syria fighters are occasionally compared to Eastern front fighters in the Second World War (De Wever [historian], 2017). In this comparison, the *The freedom fighter* counter-frame could be easily recognised. After all, Eastern front fighters were following their ideals, and these (mostly) young people believed that they were actually doing the right thing. The same exercise could apply for the radicalisation of the political extreme right or extreme left. The frame matrix thus suggests that there is no direct link between radicalisation and Islam.

The overview of twelve frames and counter-frames leads one to question their interconnection and what underlying patterns they could share. In this case study, multiple counter-frames cannot be placed across one frame. There are, however, several clear, logical relationships. Some frames and counter-frames are situated at the micro-level, namely *A*

criminal career, *Puberty, Meaningfulness, The freedom fighter* and *Penance.* The *Resilience* and *An open mind* counter-frames are situated at the meso-level. *Virus, Mutiny, Clash of civilisations, Diversity* and *A catalyst* can be found at the macro-level. Reference to these levels and the distinctions between them can also be found in the literature on radicalisation (Feddes et al., 2016; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; Schmid, 2013).

Diversity and *Meaningfulness* are refuting to use 'radicalisation'. They express the idea that, when people talk about radicalisation, they are actually discussing another topic: the ambivalence of ideology or religion, or the natural need for spirituality. Both counter-frames intend to unmask the sensationalism surrounding radicalisation and explain that it actually represents something else – something *normal*. *Puberty* does not refute the idea of radicalisation, but does attempt to normalise the issue. This reinstitutes the discussion on defining radicalisation as a *social construct.* According to these counter-frames, interpreting radicalisation as 'an attempt to lead a good life', 'a normal phase in life' or 'a certain interpretation of ideology', there is no need to use the term 'radicalisation'. Radicalisation is then an alternative term for a known phenomenon and as such it is normalised.

In addition, in light of the fact that twelve different perspectives are used to view radicalisation, the word itself loses its explanatory value. Instead of making it easier to discuss a phenomenon and creating a mutually agreed-upon definition, the concept is contested and becomes somewhat ambiguous. Some advocate the adoption of a different term and an end to the 'container concept' usage of radicalisation (e.g. Reinares et al. (2008) suggested the alternative: "socialization into extremism which manifests itself in terrorism"). Due to the widespread use of the term, avoiding it is a challenge. Especially when dealing with radicalisation as a social construct, the presented overview of frames and counter-frames can clarify the entanglement of various definitions and perspectives. By using the frame matrix, it is possible to recognise frames used by the different stakeholders. Becoming aware of one's own framing might also clarify the perspectives of others. For instance, in *Clash of civilisations*, both groups are using the same framing methods, directed at each other. Realising this might provide more insight into 'the Other's' concerns, arguments or doubts.

Not only other stakeholders, but also other radicalisation theories can fit into the frame matrix as well. According to the relative deprivation theory (Gurr, 1970), collective violence or terrorism occurs when people feel neglected regarding economic, social or cultural benefits they feel entitled to. This theory aligns with the *Mutiny* narrative. Social movement theory

(SMT) (Klandermans & Oegema, 1987), which involves protests, motivational aspects and the mobilisation of new members to join and advocate for a changing society, would fit in with the ideas encompassed in *A catalyst.* Dalgaard-Nielsen (2008) linked SMT to framing theory, arguing that both can help in understanding radicalisation by focusing on processes rather than on socio-demographic elements. According to securitising theory, an issue is securitised when it is framed as "an existential threat requiring emergency action" (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 27), which shares aspects of the *Virus* narrative.

The debate on radicalisation might seem chaotic and overwhelming, but it did bring underlying tensions to the foreground where they can be debated openly. Moreover, the frames of radicalisation are connected to the framing of terrorism, migration, the role of religion (Islam) in society and multiculturalism, as Lynch (2013) also suggested. *Meaningfulness,* for example draws attention to the elements of dealing with religion and spirituality, while *Mutiny* aims to stress structural inequality. *Clash of civilisations* includes the debate on the compatibility of different cultures. Examining the cycle of expression of fear towards Islam reveals the consequent feeling of being unwelcome and unappreciated experienced by young Muslim people, who might then turn their back to society, which in turn invokes more fear of a closed group, further reinforcing the other elements in the cycle. The ways in which the media report on radicalisation might have a strong impact on the population groups involved, which is the central focus of the following chapters.

PART II: PERCEPTION

Chapter 4. Cartoon Elicitation: Can Drawings Facilitate Interviews on Sensitive Topics?

Researching sensitive topics poses multiple methodological and ethical challenges. To overcome these, this chapter proposes the method of cartoon elicitation, inspired by photo-elicitation and based on framing theory. The impersonality and satire of cartoons and the distance made between a sensitive topic and real life events can diminish potential feelings of threat among respondents. The cartoons offered opportunities to: (a) discuss potential stigmatising aspects of a sensitive topic; (b) trigger memories while empowering participants to decide what (not) to share with the researchers; and (c) stimulate rapport between researchers and participants. The contribution elaborately examines the used method in a case study where radicalisation was debated with members of the 'suspect community'. It is discussed how this method is applicable to study a broad range of sensitive topics.

4.1 Introduction

Researching sensitive topics implies that "there are potential consequences or implications, either directly for the participants in the research or for the class of individuals represented in the research" (Sieber & Stanley, 1988, p. 49). Lee and Renzetti (1990) argued that this definition includes nearly all research and thus advocate focusing on topics that seem to be threatening to the research subjects. For instance, research on sexuality with older people (Gledhill et al., 2008), child sexual abuse (Arata, 1998) or immigrant experiences (Cleaveland & Kirsch, 2020) can be considered sensitive.

Sensitive topics exist in a context of invisibility and powerlessness – the voices of the concerned groups are not regularly voiced and heard (Jansen & Davis, 1998). The researcher is deemed to be in a more powerful position than the participant, with determining control over the course of the research (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007). This feeling of vulnerability or powerlessness may feel threatening to the participants, giving them little control over the research process and the effect of the research results on their community (Elam & Fenton, 2003). Thus, when studying a sensitive topic, researchers often focus on empowering the participant (e.g. Goodman et al., 2011; Marsh et al., 2017) and look for methodologies that give the participants voice (Pincock & Jones, 2020).

In any case, researching sensitive topics poses methodological and ethical challenges. Ethically, research on sensitive topics, in sensitive places, has the potential to cause the participants and the researchers discomfort and distress (Adeloye et al., 2019). A fear of disapproval (for example, when discussing deviant or sexual behaviour) can concern the participants (Elam & Fenton, 2003). The subjectivity of the topic can evoke intense emotions. However, Elmir and colleagues (2011) state that talking about an experience in a safe and respectful environment might help gaining personal control over the event or situation. As a result, sensitivity of the research can also impact the different stages of the research process (Siegel & Baumann, 1986), as researchers can be perceived as threatening by one group, but as non-threatening by another (Goyder, 1987). Additionally, studies that investigate deviant activities can be sensitive because the participants might fear identification or stigmatization (Lee & Renzetti, 1990). This leads to some methodological challenges, such as the recruitment of participants, as these fears and feelings can lead to powerful gatekeepers imposing restrictions on researchers (Renzetti & Lee, 1993). The combination of these factors can

influence the choice of topics to be investigated, because limitations (e.g., participant recruitment) can restrain research.

This chapter suggests cartoon elicitation, inspired by photo-elicitation, as a method to overcome these diverging challenges. The developed method is discussed through methodological choices and challenges the researchers faced in a case study of discussing radicalisation with the 'suspect community'.

4.2 Researching sensitive topics

Researching sensitive topics is not limited to qualitative research. Questionnaires have been used to ask sensitive questions (Lee, 1993). A comparative study by Langhinrichsen-Rohling and colleagues (2006) showed that youth reports little distress over self-reporting surveys on sensitive events (e.g. drug use or suicidality). However, qualitative research is discussed to be best suited for obtaining techniques such as probing (Bowling, 2014). Focusing on interviews, advice is given: make sure the interview is not disturbed or overheard (Adeloye et al., 2019), build rapport and trust with participants (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007) while paying attention to the potential emotional burden for the researcher (Lee, 1993) as well as the emotional distress for the participants (Decker et al., 2011).

Elam and Fenton consider research among ethnic minority communities to pose additional challenges, where a collaborative approach is beneficial to both researcher and participant (Elam & Fenton, 2003). For example, the immigration status of the participant might have an impact on their decision to open up to a researcher (Elam & Fenton, 2003).

4.2.1 Photo-elicitation as a participatory solution

Photo-elicitation might provide an answer to the ethical and methodological questions posed by doing research on a sensitive topic. Photo-elicitation is "inserting a photograph into a research interview" (Harper, 2002, p. 13). This can happen in different ways: by inserting pictures chosen by the researcher (Buckley, 2014; Matteucci, 2013) or by letting the participants take pictures, and discussing them later in an interview (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Humpage et al., 2019; Kwesell, 2020) (For an overview of possibilities, see Tornabene et al., 2018). However, when inserting researcher-driven images in an interview, a researchers bias is introduced as well (Matteucci, 2013), whereas using participant-driven images might create self-representation bias (Prosser, 1992). Epstein et al. (2006) elaborately discuss the balancing of choosing participant-driven or researcher-driven pictures in research with children with

cancer. Having the kids take the pictures added an extra task on the participants in a moment where they should enjoy free time, while pictures taken by the researchers might not include the perspectives of the children.

There are clear advantages to using photo-elicitation methodology in a context of urban environments, and particularly with less powerful groups in society (Rose, 2016). First, photographs can evoke new information (Allen, 2011; Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Darbyshire et al., 2005). For example, by letting the participants take their own pictures and discussing them in interviews when studying sexual cultures in a school environment, Allen (2011) learned more about the role of locker rooms, a location she could not enter nor knew the importance off. Secondly, using participant-driven photo-elicitation focuses on day-to-day activities which are easily overlooked in standard interviews (Darbyshire et al., 2005; Rose, 2016). Thirdly, discussing pictures taken by participants give way for more in-depth, personal conversations with room for emotions while triggering memories (Bagnoli, 2009; Harper, 2002; Rose, 2016; Warner et al., 2016). For example, the picture of a street can stimulate the sense of smell in that street and trigger memories (Matteucci, 2013). Fourthly, using photos, either participant or researcher-driven, can unclench the tension and ease rapport between researcher and participant (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Kunimoto, 2004). Lastly, photo-elicitation can bridge worlds that are more culturally distinct (Harper, 2002). For example, photos were used to discuss the neighbourhood Schilderswijk, The Hague, with the ethnically heterogeneous inhabitants and elicited information about different perceptions on the same reality (Van Der Does et al., 1992).

A possible explanation for these advantages might be that images are polysemic (Barthes, 1977), hence, they incorporate multiple meanings. It is the insights from the different meanings attributed to images that researchers in photo-elicitation interviews are interested in (Bignante, 2010). A photographic image has no code, compared to drawings, paintings or cinema which add a supplementary message (Barthes, 1977).

Considering these benefices of photo-elicitation, the method of participant-driven photos has often been used in research on sensitive topics. For example, Allen (2011) used photo-methods to study sexuality in a school environment and Humpage et al. (2019) applied it in research with refugees. Researchers using photo-elicitation methods in such research, claim aspects of empowering the interviewee (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Lorenz, 2011), and giving voice to the participants (Smith & Woodward, 1998) by giving them partial control (Rose, 2016).

4.2.2 From photo-elicitation to cartoon elicitation

Even though there are multiple valuable aspects of using photo-elicitation in sensitive research, cartoon elicitation can bring some added value. Cartoons have the advantage over pictures that they can be impersonal. Showing pictures of specific persons involves a choice for that one specific event of individual, and participants might have strong opinions about those individuals or events, or what they represent. For example, showing a photograph of a politician will be a specific politician, and is not able to represent the sole 'idea' of a politician. By using drawings, the researchers can avoid this side effect, depending on the purpose of the research. By having abstract or schematic instead of concrete representations, there is more room for interpretation by the reader. When the aim is to discuss a general phenomenon (e.g. refugees, or #metoo), it can be desired to not have a particular photograph or case chosen by the researchers.

A cartoon captures most often humour and satire, can be impersonal and offers the possibility to interpretation by the reader, all aspects that are advantages in researching sensitive topics. Cartoons either combine the verbal and the visual semiotic modes, or only present the visual (Tsakona, 2009). The humour and metaphors resulting from these elements (Tsakona, 2009) stimulates the readers to provocation and laughter (Kyong Liong & Kyŏng-nyong, 1996). A part of the cartoons signification takes places in the minds of the readers (Kyong Liong & Kyŏng-nyong, 1996), as lines, forms and colours in a drawing are interpreted as people, furniture, or whatever they represent (Jappy, 2013). The humour might stimulate participants to disclose personal beliefs (MacGillivray, 2005).

Cartoon elicitation has been used in both non-sensitive and sensitive research. It has been applied in speech-related research (Nathan, 1992) or to elicit sign-language (Duncan, 2005). Theron and Cameron (2011) let their teenager participants draw their own cartoons to depict their migrating journey. Used with sensitive topics, such as stereotypical cartoons or AIDS (Harrison, 2009; Mutonyi & Kendrick, 2011), cartoons have shown to be able to transcend taboos, they can be culturally sensitive and reliable (Bidaut-Russell et al., 1998). It is made possible to discuss current political issues since the focus is on the cartoons rather than on a person's personal views (Dougherty, 2002).

Cartoons offer advantages to research sensitive topics, since by using metaphors in visuals (Warburton, 2005), issues are easier discussed by the use of satire in cartoons (Moloney et al., 2013). Using visuals in combination with words creates richer data for the researcher

(Fradkin, 2019; Sligo & Tilley, 2011). The cartoon is likely to draw the attention of the participant by using humour, as well as presenting a riddle: "What does this mean?". While, where a text may be authentic, and participants may evaluate that differently, a cartoon is clearly fictional (Nathan, 1992).

Finally, cartoons draw upon stereotypes and synthesis the cultural narrative (Warburton & Saunders, 1996). Therefore, how they will be read depends on the public recognisability of the metaphors and stereotypes. The use of stereotypes in cartoons facilitated conversations on prejudice about gay people, giving opportunity for participants to talk about personal intolerances via the cartoons (MacGillivray, 2005). An important requirement is that the participant understands that the used stereotypes and presumptions are not the views of the researcher, but rather that the methodology is a facilitator of making these perspectives tangible and discussable to which cartoons can contribute.

4.3 An evaluation of the cartoon elicitation method

4.3.1 Case-study: Researching radicalisation in conversations with the 'suspect community'

The cartoon elicitation methodology is illustrated by means of a case-study, conversations on radicalisation with the suspect community, which should be understood as a minority group perceived as suspect based on their race, religion, class or other factors (Pantazis & Pemberton, 2009). The research can be seen as sensitive because of the potential consequences for the respondents in participating in a study on the stigmatising 'radicalisation' concept and the potential trigger of traumatic memories. The case study consists of two focus groups, one in Antwerp with eleven participants (male and female) and one in Verviers with eight participants (all male). The sample was added with six on-on-one interviews in Brussels (all male). More information on the case is discussed in the following Chapter 5.

4.3.2 Combining interviews and focus groups

Sensitive research has been studied from both a quantitative (e.g., Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2006) and a qualitative approach (e.g., Cleaveland & Kirsch, 2020). In the context of discussing a potential stigmatising concept, the authors preferred a qualitative approach, considering qualitative research provides techniques by which sensitive and complex studies can be studies in-depth, for example through probing (Bowling, 2014). Qualitative research provides participants considerable control over the interview process (Corbin & Morse, 2003).

Participants hold the agency to put the interview on-hold, can choose whether or not to answer questions and how much personal information they provide the interviewer (Corbin & Morse, 2003). It could be considered to use cartoons in a survey-context, where an image is presented and respondents are asked a series of questions on for example, credibility, humour or representation. A survey offers the opportunity to speak freely in anonymity without a researcher present. However, with survey methodology, the options to contextualise potential stigmatising representations are limited to an accompanying text – which the researchers can only hope the participants will fully read. The researcher cannot respond to spontaneous reactions or questions by the participants.

Both interviews and focus groups were used to gain experience and learn about the procedure. Furthermore, a combination of both methods can enrich the knowledge on a phenomenon and increase the trustworthiness of findings (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). Participants that were contacted individually took part in the in-depth interviews, while pre-existing groups (e.g., through youth work) were approached together through focus groups. Within the focus groups, which lasted around two hours, the cartoons stirred discussion among the participants, giving them the opportunity to bounce ideas back and forth. Focus groups bring in the rich research data of interaction between participants (Kitzinger, 1994), and working with pre-existing groups provides a social context in which ideas are formed and decisions are made (Khan & Manderson, 1992). However, group dynamics give some participants more input, where others shy away. Cartoon elicitation can facilitate these group dynamics by introducing a card sorting exercise that requires everyone's participation rather than the oral discussion of what is represented. For example, by having to place the cards in an order (agree – neutral – not agree) and comparing them with the other participants, interaction is stimulated. Individual interviews reveal complementary information to focus groups, not substitutes (Kaplowitz, 2000). In the one-on-one interviews, which lasted around 90 minutes, participants had the timeframe to elaborate broader on their thoughts and speak freely. However, they were not questioned nor stimulated in their thinking by peers, which creates a more informal dynamic than in a researcher – participant conversation. Additionally, focus groups are found to create a space for sensitive topics, which are less prevalent in one-on-one conversations (Guest et al., 2017). A conversation in which other participants share their relatable experiences might make others feel at ease to do the same, whereas in an interview, the power dynamics might be harder to pierce.

4.3.3 An evaluation of cartoon elicitation

When applying cartoon elicitation technique, there are three main possibilities. The researchers can choose what cartoons to present to the participants, the participants can be asked to bring cartoons to the conversation, or the participants can be asked to draw a cartoon. Graphic elicitation techniques (Copeland & Agosto, 2012) can be helpful to visualize personal perspectives of participants. This drawing can happen either collectively or individually. When drawing collectively, the conversation that takes place while making the drawing is a rich source of data for the researcher. Here, it would be possible to learn if the participants incorporate new perspectives, how they go about taboo topics, what role humour plays in the drawings. In a similar way, by letting participants bring their own cartoons to the conversations, or letting them select from a broad range of cartoons presented by the researcher, more can be learned about personal preferences of participants: Do they reach out to humorous perspectives? Do they include or object to stigmatising representations? What type of drawings and potential stereotypes do they include?

Combining cartoon elicitation with framing on a sensitive topic is not an easy task. To be able to base the cartoons on the dominant framing, one must have the competence to devise and draw these cartoons oneself, or one must find a (professional) cartoonist willing to take this on. In the presented case study, cartoons were created by the researchers and presented to the participants. With the researcher-based cartoons, it was aimed to discuss different frames on radicalisation based on previous research (see Chapter 3) and used the cartoon elicitation method as a facilitation to introduce these perspectives in the conversation. Frames help grasp reality by making certain elements more salient and obscuring others (Entman, 1993). As such, each frame represents a possible perspective that gives meaning to an issue, in this case radicalisation, and through which social reality is constructed. Frame packages incorporate framing devices (e.g., visual depictions, lexical choices, metaphorical language) and reasoning devices, ranging from causes to consequences, which form a logical argument (Van Gorp, 2007b). The authors have explored ways to use a number of manifest framing devices to express the underlying reasoning visually in an appealing way in a series of twelve cartoons. Four cartoons presented a problematizing view of radicalisation, and eight presented a deproblematizing view of radicalisation, which in this study are referred to as counter-frames.

The verbal part of each every cartoon was translated in Dutch, French and English, to be able to use them in the mother tongue of the participants. The cartoons were printed on cards the size of postcards to be used in the conversations.

Which framing and reasoning devices to depict?

Each of the twelve frames as described in Chapter 3 were translated into a different cartoon (see further, and Appendix C for all cartoons). It is possible either to dedicate one cartoon to one frame, or to combine multiple frames into one cartoon. In an earlier study (see Van Gorp et al., 2021), one of the authors researched the sensitive topic of euthanasia and translated the results into cartoons. The approach differed from the method on radicalisation, considering that in the euthanasia study, the cartoons combined multiple frames. So one image portrayed different perspectives on euthanasia. For example, in Figure 4, we see both the idea presented that a doctor 'is not God' and at the same time, the idea that informal caregivers are presenting euthanasia as an easy solution as they consider taking care of someone who is in need a 'heavy burden'.

Figure 4 Cartoon in which multiple frames on euthanasia are applied: 'I'm not God", "Heavy burden" and "Thou shalt not kill".

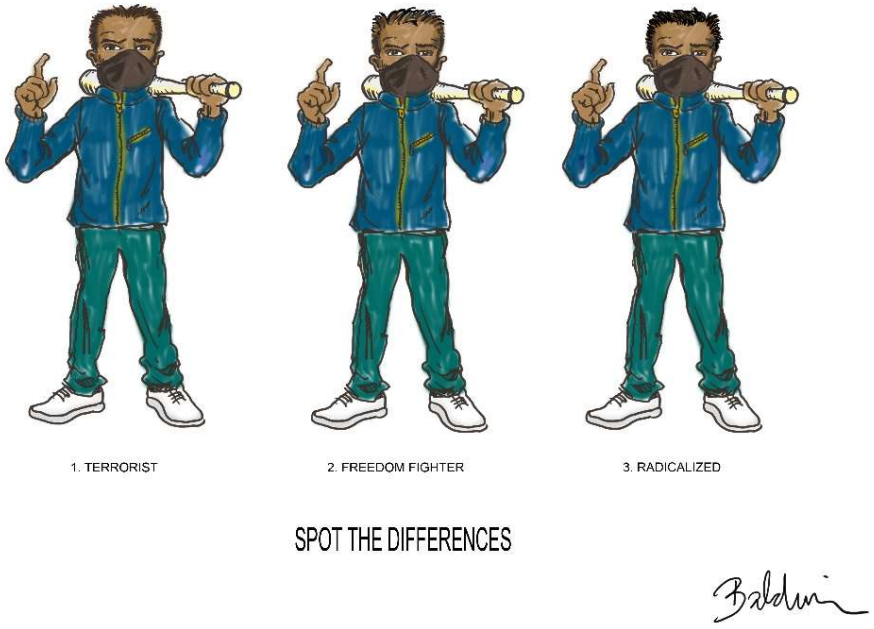


Researchers can opt either to create a cartoon for each identified frame or to combine different frames in one cartoon. With the first option, the advantage is that there is more certainty that each different perspective will be discussed. However, many frames mean many cartoons to be presented. In this study, there were twelve frames, thus twelve cartoons to imagine, draw and test. When using the second option, there are less separate cartoons to discuss and thus more

time during the interview to discuss each cartoon. In the conversations, participants were less engaged and tired by the end of the conversation when a high stack of separate cards needed to be discussed. However, as shown in Figure 4, the combination of frames leads to complexity. The contrast creates tension that shows the multiple, contradictory possibilities to look at, in this case, euthanasia.

The second author made sketches. The cartoons were drawn freehand, then inked and coloured by computer. This method made it possible to make adjustments (e.g. colour). Each cartoon went through an adaptation-phase. In some cases, the visualization was evident, for example with the *Virus*-frame. Mostly the counter-frames showed to be more complex and more abstract, hence being more difficult to present a simple image of the overall idea. *The Resilience*-counter-frame (see Appendix C) was one of these more complex counter-frames. This was reflected in the conversations: simplified perspectives (e.g., *Virus, Puberty*) were easily comprehensible and sparked immediate debate, compared to complex representations (e.g., *Resilience, A catalyst*) which needed some explanation from the researcher. For example, *The freedom fighter* (Figure 5) mentions a question: "Spot the differences". The cartoon confused the participants since they started looking at the pictures as a puzzle: What are the differences in drawing? Is it the hair? Is it the clothes? These questions initiated a side-quest and derived the participants from reflection upon the perspective presented in the image, and had to be brought back to that aspect by the researcher. It could be argued that posing a different question with the cartoons (e.g. 'fighting for freedom or terror?') could help avoid this detour. It is thus advised to strive for clear depictions rather than an overly complex integration of ideas.

Figure 5 Cartoon on radicalisation representing the Freedom Fighter counter-frame.

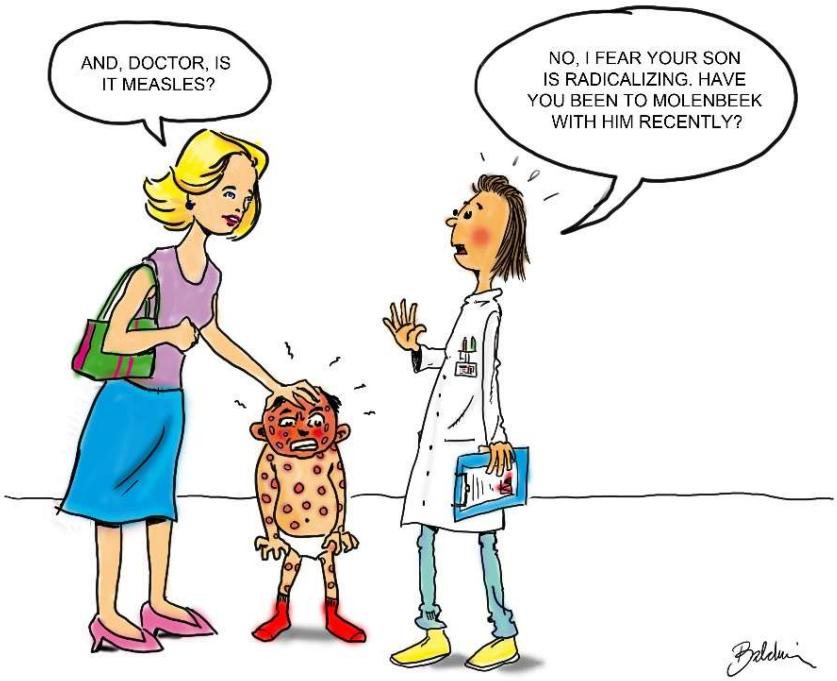


Dealing with stereotypical depictions and clichés

A preliminary study indicated that small details in drawings could elicit unforeseen reactions from participants. In a presented cartoon on euthanasia, a mother is wearing high heels while doing the dishes. One of the participants of the conversation reacted strongly to this detail, which was not intentionally put there by the researchers. The participant focused on how those heels were a representation of the nonchalance of the mother towards the child and a lot of anger was directed towards her.

When drawing the different (counter-)frames, the issue of how to present members of the suspect community popped up. What skin colour should be used? Male or female? It was decided to mix different skin colours throughout the various cartoons. In some cartoons, the authors deliberately chose to present a white, fancy female (see Figure 6) to play with the stereotypes in the radicalisation debate. Some typical prototypes were included, for example young boys with hoodies in the *Meaningfulness* cartoon. This depiction was immediately identified as 'the Muslim', in addition to a woman with a carrot who was 'the vegetarian' and less easily recognized as such.

Figure 6 Cartoon on radicalisation representing the Virus frame.



The participants pointed out aspects of the drawings the authors did not consider. For example, in the *Freedom Fighters* cartoon, the participants mentioned the Tawhid-gesture – holding up a single index finger referencing to the oneness of God – of the persons portrayed. The authors did not reflect upon this interpretation of the gesture before. Similarly, the *Criminal career* was critiqued for mentioning 'Syria' as a destination rather than 'Daesh'. Personal experiences and perspectives affect the interpretation of images. They can thus stimulate broader debate than initially intended by the researchers, at the same time; these responses indicate the importance of pretesting the material in effort to eliminate researchers' bias.

With the *Virus*-frame, as with the *Diversity* and *Puberty* counter-frames (see overview Appendix C) intentionally a little child was used to depict a person seen as radicalised. This aspect took the intensity out of the made accusations. Similarly, with the *Penance* counter-frame (Figure 7), the cartoon referred to self-sacrifice made to receive 72 virgins. The cartoon presents only a foot remaining after the self-sacrifice. The participants appreciated these cartoons, as they play with stereotypes in a way that the cartoons ridicule these ideas:

> "That's the idea: they're going to have...72...? *(laughs).* […] I blow myself up to get a thousand... I don't know. *(laughs)* […] Frankly, if you say that, I insult you! Without

being mean or anything, but I'm telling you ... it's a joke. […] It's all psychology. […] I don't know how they get it into your head." *(Participant 1, interview)*

Figure 7 Cartoon on radicalisation representing the Penance counter-frame.



Similar tactics were used in research on migration and refugees, where the second author contributed cartoons to be used in focus groups with young people (Huyge et al., 2020). The cartoon *The hostile intruder* for example, juxtaposes four stereotypes–a banker, a thief, a small child, and a refugee–asking the question: "who is the biggest bandit?" (see Appendix C). Because cartoons make a simplified abstraction of reality, often stereotypes are integrated (the banker as a chubby male wearing a costume, the professor as a confused, elder male) to easily transfer a message ('this is who we are talking about'). When drawing the cartoons in the context of sensitive research, it is advised to actively counter these stereotypes (e.g., representing a female doctor) or explicitly ridicule them (e.g., the *Penance* counter-frame). The humour functioned as a way to take potential tension out of the conversation.

Pretesting the elicitation material

The sketches were discussed in the inner research group and presented to a guidance committee of 18 members, where trust persons from the field were present. Based on these discussions, one suggested cartoon was dismissed for being too unclear. In the discussions, the *Virus* frame and the *Penance* counter-frame cartoon were seen as potentially stigmatising and it was

suggested not to start the conversations with these cartoons. In sum, it is advised to discuss the considered cartoons in advance with representatives of the potential participants.

Cartoon elicitation procedure

All essential aspects of an interview were taken into account, especially bearing in mind the relative vulnerability of the participants, thus ethical approval and a safe space to conduct the interviews. Every participant sat around a table, and received a stack of twelve cards. The postcards gave the participants control. They could go back to earlier presented ideas, go as fast as they wanted to, while in the group discussion exchange with their neighbour on the different drawings, another advantage of photo elicitation (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007).

As a preparation for the conversations, the researchers shuffled the twelve cards, and then ordered the other stacks in the same order as the first one. The stacks all have the pictures directed to the side of the table, so the participants did not see what is on the cards yet. One by one, the cards were turned. The participants discussed one card fully before they get over to the next one. When a new cartoon was introduced, the researcher let the participants first interpret it, stimulated by questions as: How do you interpret what is on the card? What associations does the cartoon make? When the cartoon was unclear, or after a discussion took place on the personal interpretation of the participants, the researcher explained the perspective the cartoon represented, which was then further discussed.

When all twelve cards were discussed, in both the interviews and the focus groups the exercise was made of individually ordering the perspectives. The question asked was: Which cartoon best reflected the participants visions on radicalisation? In the interviews, the cartoons were compared to each other, whereas in the focus groups, the order of cartoons was compared to that of the other people around the table. However, in most conversations, the attention of the young participants weakened with this exercise, since they had already seen all the cartoons, discussed each of them and felt reluctant to go over all of them again.

Elaboration of answers through cartoons

Before being presented the cartoons, the participants and the researchers had an open conversation on their lifeworld, their neighbourhood and the perception of it, aspects of their life they would like to see changed. Often, this conversation struggled; the answers were short and defensive. It was challenging the researcher to direct the conversation towards *radicalisation*. When asked questions about the sensitive topic radicalisation, most participants answered shortly (“I can’t really find any answers or examples, sorry”) or in a distant, non-

personal way and elaborated little on the topic, both in presence of a trust person (in this case, a youth worker) and without. The trust person was present to help facilitate the conversation, as well as help create a trusted environment. However, it is possible that this presence made the participants hesitant to open up in the beginning, as this is someone the participants will have a continuing relation with.

When the cartoons were presented, it gave the participants some grip, some reference to start talking from their own lifeworld. For example, after presenting the cartoon *Meaningfulness* (an overview of the cartoons in Appendix C), this participant reflected upon a personal experience:

> "He *[a friend]* told me that just a few years ago he saw videos, injustices by US police officers. Blacks who are killed by the police unfairly. […] Exactly after he saw this video, he was really going to join Black [Lives] Matters [sic], he was going to do that. [...] Now he tries to understand the policeman at the same time and also the sociology situation in the society. [...] If he did not want to make that decision, he just became radical. He was really at the end of becoming radical." (*Participant 2, interview*)

Similarly, after being presented the *Criminal career* cartoon, participants opened up on discriminatory experiences with the police, while the distance towards the researchers seemed less when the cartoons were shown by shared laughter, asking questions to the researcher and having fun with comparing the cards.

Since the drawings were impersonal, it became possible to discuss topics in a *non-personal* way. The humour, impersonality and interpretative aspect of the drawings gave the participants the choice to either discuss the issue in a distant matter, or share personal experiences. The detour taken by the images lead to participants opening up on memories, as reflected in the shared citation.

4.4 Discussion

Cartoon elicitation is an innovative method that can be used with a broad range of sensitive topics. The method did indicate several advantages, such as the elaboration of answers, the possibility to discuss stigmatising and stereotypical aspects in sensitive topics and the diminishing of power relations between researcher and participant, adding to previous experiences with cartoon elicitation (Cameron & Theron, 2011; Harrison, 2009; Nathan, 1992). Reflecting on the researcher-driven method in the case of sensitive research, five aspects need to be taken into account.

Firstly, it is advised to pre-test the cartoons with a guidance committee, especially when using cartoons that play with stereotypes and stigmatising references. By presenting the cartoons to people that know the target group, the sensitivities and the possibilities, the researcher takes an important step in trying to eliminate all possible harm for the participants. Additionally, this round of feedback can diminish the researcher's personal bias in conceptualizing the cartoons.

Secondly, the method enables conversations on potentially painful topics and stereotypical representations by the use of humour and ridiculing stereotypes or countering them (Kyong Liong & Kyŏng-nyong, 1996; MacGillivray, 2005; Tsakona, 2009). The cartoons that are potentially stigmatising, as indicated by a pre-test, are best presented with additional explanation to the participants. If this context can be provided in a survey or experiment for example, the anonymous environment can stimulate insights in the effect of such cartoons.

Thirdly, the use of riddles and drawings helps to keep participants' attention, and gave them control over the conversation, an aspect addressed in earlier research (Corbin & Morse, 2003). However, in the case study, twelve cartoons were too many; participants were counting down to the end, and some cartoons were too complex. Having less cartoons (ideally around eight, based on our experiences) means combining ideas into one cartoon to diminish the amount of cards to present. This is possible (as with the example on Euthanasia, see Figure 4) when the drawings remain easily comprehensible.

Fourthly, the experience with both interviews and focus groups make way for some recommendations. Through the interaction between the participants, as indicated by previous research (Khan & Manderson, 1992; Kitzinger, 1994) valuable insights on the topic are gathered. As in all focus groups, attention needs to be paid to group dynamics: Who is speaking most? Are people silent, and why? In interviews, the power dynamics might be more persistent (see Guest et al., 2017). Due to the lack of interaction with peers, participants might more easily say "I don't understand this cartoon" or "I have nothing more to say on this". Being prepared with more probing questions, can stimulate the reflection process, which in focus groups is stimulated through conversation. Examples are: What captures your attention first when you look at this cartoon? What does that mean to you? Are there other elements that you think are important?

Fifthly, the presence of trust persons has both benefits and drawbacks. As mentioned, the presence in one of the focus groups was preferable for a trustful, amicable group

atmosphere. However, the participants did not fully engage in the first part of the conversation, or answered the questions to the trust person rather than the researcher. Research indicated trust of the researcher to be highly related to trust in the institution (Guillemin et al., 2018), which might be part of the initial hesitation. It is not possible to compare this to the other focus group (without trust person), as the group dynamics were unalike. The pondering upon answering might also be general discomfort with a research setting, as this faded during the cartoon elicitation section.

Future research can further explore this method of facilitating conversations, which creates room to discuss potential stigmatising aspects. It is the question of continuing research if every sensitive topic lends itself to the methodology. Topics in the sexual atmosphere and specifically themes as incest or rape seem challenging to visualize and discuss at first glance. However, the cartoon elicitation methodology might provide opportunities here for, for example, victims or perpetrators to discuss such events separately, since the cartoons create the space to either reflect on personal experiences, or take the conversation to a more abstract level, but leave the control in hands of the participant. The cartoon elicitation method is particularly useful for polarising issues considering the exploration of different perspectives and contradictions in the cartoons.

Furthermore, the technique can be combined with photo-elicitation by inserting photos of persons or events combined with cartoons. Participants could be asked to bring their own photos they found in the press on the topic. In such combination, participant-driven images can stir the conversation in a direction of media representation, and researcher-driven cartoons can help to examine such perspectives critically.

Chapter 5. Cartoons as Bridge Builders: Dialoguing on Radicalisation with the 'Suspect Community'

Terrorist attacks and the departure of foreign fighters have created a hasty security approach towards radicalisation in many countries; similarly in Belgium, the country under scrutiny in this dissertation. Implemented policies affect society by imposing a dominant security frame. This study centres around conversations with members of the 'suspect community', young people with a migration background in Molenbeek, Verviers and Antwerp. Cartoon elicitation was used in in-depth interviews and focus groups to understand their experiences with the dominant framing of radicalisation and us-versus-them dynamics of the constructed out-group. Framed by media, policy makers and academia as 'suspects', members of this *silenced overrepresented minority* are *dual distancing* themselves from the stigmatising radicalisation-label and perceived radicalised individuals. The young people contest the radicalisation stigma, labelled as harmful for themselves and their peers. However, they seem to accept the radicalisation paradigm in reference to radicalised individuals that commit to extremism and terrorism. Simultaneously, the results indicate an internalisation of stigmatising perspectives.

5.1 Introduction

In the aftermath of the attacks in Paris (2015) and Brussels (2016) as well as the departure of significant numbers of Syria fighters from Belgium (an estimation of 470 in January 2016, see Coolsaet, 2016), radicalisation and the public debate on radicalisation have caused great indignation and alarm in Belgium. Having to deal with extremism, terrorist attacks and foreign fighters, Belgium struggled to find an answer to these violent challenges. *Deradicalisation* became the key concept for policy as a solution to prevent these tendencies.

News coverage of terrorism has tended to be associated with 'Islamic culture' (Ruigrok & van Atteveldt, 2007). Similarly, the term radicalisation narrowed down into "Muslim-radicalisation" (Fadil, 2017) and became focused on "everything that happens before the bomb goes off" (Neumann, 2008, p. 4). As a consequence, focus was on *repression* and *prevention*, for example by the securitisation of social policy (Ragazzi, 2017). Such prevention policies, however, have risked alienating the Muslim community (Kundnani, 2009). These strategies endanger further stigmatising Muslim communities (Awan, 2012) and could result in labelling the Muslim community as a *suspect community* (Lakhani, 2012; Pantazis & Pemberton, 2009) which impacts daily life (Brown & Saeed, 2015).

An in-group/out-group perspective strengthens an 'us-versus-them' narrative, fuelled by media representation (Choma et al., 2015; Kteily et al., 2014; Lopes & Jaspal, 2015). In-groups distance from out-groups in systematic securitised othering (Breen-Smyth, 2014; O'Loughlin et al., 2011). The interaction between media representation and the adaption of behaviour creates a socially constructed reality that comes to dominate society, expressed in for example targeted deradicalisation policies. The considered out-group can rely on distancing to cope with such exclusion mechanisms (Aiello & McQueeney, 2016; Cherney & Murphy, 2016) thus creating new in- and out-groups.

The perspective of those directly involved seems to be marginalised, not only in policy, public debate and media, but also in academic literature. Because these minorities are disproportionately represented in terms of news media, security and research attention, while their personal voices are silenced in these channels, we suggest characterizing them as *silenced overrepresented minorities*. Simultaneously, they are not viewed as the audience of this dominant negative news media. One factor for this missing voice in research could be pragmatic, namely the sensitivity of the topic and the difficulty of gaining access. By discussing

'radicalisation', the researcher might imply suspecting the participants. This study focuses on two main themes, firstly, the interpretation of the 'us-and-them' perspective within the suspect community, and, secondly, how its members experience the socially constructed reality of radicalisation.

5.2 Literature review

5.2.1 'Us' versus a radicalising 'them'

Following the spread of radical Islamist terrorism in Western societies, news media have increasingly reported in negative terms on Muslims (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017). After 9/11 as well as the Madrid (2004) and London (2005) bombings, the discursive creation of "migrants", or more common, "Muslims" in the West (Thomas-Olalde & Velho, 2011) represented monolithic collectives (Demarest et al., 2020). As Kteily and colleagues (2014) addressed, the in-group/out-group bias influences opinions on appropriate punishments for assumed terrorists. The media representation intensified these in-group/out-group biases and contributed to an 'us-versus-them' polarisation (Choma et al., 2015; Dawson, 2011; Lopes & Jaspal, 2015). However, there is a racial component to these processes: European white Muslims are categorised differently than Arab Others (Rexhepi, 2018).

Policed multiculturalism, that is, looking at diversity through a security lens (Ragazzi, 2016) follows from an assumed link between home-grown terrorism and multiculturalism. The securitisation of Islam specifically turned Muslims into a threat (Ajala, 2014). Portraying the West as constantly at risk of the chaotic and violent Islam (Campbell, 2017), it created a suspect community, an imagined community "created in and by the securitised imagination and enacted in a processes of 'othering' through a range of security practices of counter-terrorism" (Breen-Smyth, 2014, p. 1). Young, seemingly Muslim, members with a migration background of stigmatised areas became part of a suspect community and were treated as a potential risk to society: They are targeted based on their "presumed membership to a sub-group. Race, ethnicity, religion, class, gender, language, accent, dress, political ideology or any combination of these factors may serve to delineate the sub-group" (Pantazis & Pemberton, 2009, p. 649). This securitised discourse impacts daily life in the experience of education, activism and identity (Brown & Saeed, 2015).

Research on distancing (e.g. Lott, 2002) has looked at out-group distancing: Non-poor distancing from poor people, or heterosexuals distancing from homosexuals. Such research has

indicated distancing in forms of using stereotypical narratives or objecting to opinions voiced by members of the stigmatised group, manifesting a clear gap between the other and oneself. O'Loughlin and colleagues (2011) applied this strategy to the context of radicalisation and saw a distancing from mainstream audiences to a dominant discourse on radicalisation. When it comes to in-group distancing, Aiello and McQueeney (2016) have looked at the distancing from the stigma of incarcerated mothers. Here, the incarcerated mothers either embrace or distance from the stigma and not from the identity. Different from the radicalisation label, however, is that 'incarcerated mothers' is a defined concept, contrary to radicalisation. It is clear whether you are an incarcerated mother, or not. However, who decides whether you are 'radicalised'? And in what sense? There is more space, which allows for even more in-group distancing. Looking at the experiences of Muslims with treatment as suspect community, Cherney and Murphy (2016) identify distancing between what participants see as 'true Muslims' and 'Islamic terrorists' as a coping strategy.

In research on sensitive topics, interviewees might not identify themselves as member of the presumed group, or they define the group in different terms (Lavorgna & Sugiura, 2020). The present study, therefore, looks at how processes of distancing might be at work in the context of a stigmatised suspect community dealing with radicalisation. Through processes of othering, in-group and outgroup thinking a suspect community is created. It is unclear, however, how these processes are at play in that construed suspect community:

RQ1: What interpretation do young people of the suspect community give to 'us' and 'them' in the debate on radicalisation?

5.2.2 Experiencing the framing of radicalisation, extremism and terrorism

Frames stress certain aspects of reality, highlighting elements and neglecting others, which can have a significant impact on public opinion, specifically for social and political issues (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2019). Considering that frames only display a snippet of reality (Carter, 2013), only a well-balanced combination of frames can represent a complete and complex picture. Frames help organise and categorise events and give them meaning (Gamson & Modigliani, 1994). However, a mediated construction of social reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Couldry & Hepp, 2017) might not always correspond with how people perceive day-to-day reality. Trying to disentangle how frames shape the social construction of reality from the actual real life events is like "being surrounded by an endless hall of mirrors" (Norris et al., 2003, p. 281).

There is an important political aspect in defining social reality. Whoever has the power in deciding who is radical, terrorist or extreme controls the power of deciding what is the norm. *Radicalisation* has been widespread since 2004, following the attacks in Madrid by home-grown terrorists (Hörnqvist & Flyghed, 2012; Kundnani, 2012). Following 9/11, radicalisation became intertwined with violent radicalisation while in its neutral sense, it means "to be extreme relative to something that is defined or accepted as normative, traditional or valued as the status quo" (Mandel, 2009, p. 150). This definition relates closely to *extremism*, since it is also understood by comparing to the 'centre' or 'norm' (Berger, 2018). Radicalisation should then be understood as the process of developing extreme ideas (Borum, 2011), a potential danger for the democratic legal order (GISS, 2007), whereas extremism is actually having those extreme ideas. In this linear comprehension, *terrorism* can be understood as "acts of violence by non-state actors, perpetrated against civilian populations, intended to cause fear, in order to achieve a political objective" (Simi & Windisch, 2020, p. 1). The blending of these concepts indicates an interpretation of radicalisation as a violent phenomenon, and can result in dehumanising, risk alienating the suspect community (Onursal & Kirkpatrick, 2019).

Terrorism (e.g., Cooke, 2003; Papacharissi et al., 2008) and radicalisation (e.g., Berbers et al., 2016) have been the focus of framing studies, while similar studies on extremism are less prevalent (e.g., Smith et al., 2019). The representation of these concepts has intersected with the representation of Muslims (Campbell, 2017). Powell (2018) indicates that terrorist acts by Muslims are represented as part of a large conspiracy, while similar acts by non-Muslims are covered as isolated.

O'Loughlin and colleagues (2011) looked at how news audiences interpret dominant discourses on radicalisation. The researchers, wanting to learn how people talk about radicalisation, conclude those participants distinct between media discourses on radicalisation and their own interpretation of the concept. The interviewees point towards a shared meaning of radicalisation and at the same time disassociate themselves from that understanding, critiquing the assumed link with Islam and Muslims (O'Loughlin et al., 2011). However, the interpretation and experience of dominant discourses on radicalisation by the *silenced overrepresented minority* are not included in earlier studies. They tend to focus on majority perspectives and give no insight in how the socially constructed reality of radicalisation is lived by the community enduring it. Thus, the second research question is:

RQ2: How do members of the suspect community experience reality construed in public discourse on radicalisation, and how do they deal with the dominating frames and with the alternatives?

5.3 Methodology

5.3.1 Participants

Some neighbourhoods in Belgian cities such as Antwerp, Vilvoorde, Molenbeek and Verviers were directly linked with previous terrorist attacks, mainly as the residence or hiding place of persons who were responsible for the terrorist attacks in the Bataclan in Paris, metro station Maalbeek and Brussels airport (2016). Furthermore, these cities have been named as location of the departures during different waves (Coolsaet, 2016b). Through these events, combined with a securitised perspective, people with an Islamic identity or a migration background living in these places were perceived as a potential 'radicalisation risk' regardless of behaviour. They are collectively seen by society as part of a monolithic, potentially dangerous unity although for the individual members, there are no reasons for these assumptions. Society classifies these young people as dangerous based on a religious and/or ethnic membership to a group. This explains the choice of respondents with a migration background from these specific neighbourhoods. In total, 25 participants were reached, with two focus groups: one with eight young people from Verviers, and one in Antwerp with eleven participants. Six one-on-one interviews were carried out with young people from different areas in Brussels (Anderlecht, Molenbeek, centre of Brussels).

The first focus group took place with only male participants, aged 18 to 22, living in Verviers. They were all from a lower socio-economic background. The focus group in Antwerp was a mixed group with 6 males and 5 females, aged 18–24, living in Antwerp and surrounding villages. Some members of the group were students, while others were employees. The one-on-one conversations were with all male participants, aged 18–22. All were students and living in Molenbeek/Brussels. All participants signed the informed consent formed approved by the university's ethical commission.

5.3.2 Overcoming the paradox of unbiasedness

Radicalisation is a sensitive topic because it might cause harm to the participants involved. By participating in a project on radicalisation, they might be labelled as 'radical', which can evoke the interest of security parties. Additionally, only by approaching these young people in the

context of a radicalisation study, the researcher seems to imply that (s)he views the potential participants as radicalised. Hence, paradoxically, researchers can oppose this dominant security frame, however, by identifying the target group, the researcher can step into this stigmatising perspective. Sometimes, research can be seen as part of a system of surveillance and control, which leads directly to the disadvantage and disempowerment of local community members (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2013). Moreover, the conversations can be stressful for the participants, evoking emotions of frustration, anger or sadness. These are concerns the authors needed to take into account throughout the research process. Offering a safe space, which allowed participants to speak freely, was an essential condition.

In-depth semi-structured or unstructured interviews are considered the best methodology to investigate sensitive topics (Elam & Fenton, 2003). Unstructured, interactive interviews provide participants considerable control over the interview process (Corbin & Morse, 2003). By combining in-depth, semi-structured interviews and focus groups, the authors incorporated personal in-depth conversations and interactive dynamics of a group discussion. Combined with cartoon elicitation, the authors aimed to create an open conversation space. The interviews averaged 90 minutes, the focus groups two hours. All conversations were transcribed verbatim and first analysed per cartoon (how did the participants respond to the different (counter-)frames) and consequentially thematically analysed to uncover patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As such, transcending the different cartoons, the themes of personal interpretation, distancing, internalisation, identity and fake news emerged.

5.3.3 Cartoon Elicitation

The authors used cartoon elicitation based on photo elicitation (Harper, 2002) to support the in-depth interviews and focus groups, elaborately described in Chapter 4. Inserting photos in an interview (Harper, 2002), can evoke more information (Allen, 2011). It makes room for personal and emotional conversations (Bagnoli, 2009) while it bridges researcher and participant relationships (Kunimoto, 2004). Cartoon elicitation continues this tradition by adding humour and satire, creating a fictional world rather than representing real life events that support a conversation on sensitive and potential stigmatising topics.

Twelve frames to define radicalisation in Belgium, as identified in Chapter 3 (for an overview, see Appendix B) were taken as a starting point. An example is the *Virus* frame, which defines radicalisation as an evil ideology that is silently spreading in society. Poisonous

ideas are present, which infect recruiters and hate preachers. On their turn, they contaminate a vulnerable young individual with these toxic ideas. Society panics, and contingency plans are activated. Seen from this metaphorical frame, government needs to actively fight the ideology and isolate affected individuals and recruiters, while building up defence mechanisms and immunity. The frame can be recognized by words or metaphors that refer to a disease, such as "turn the Grand Mosque into a positive medicine" (Idrissi [politician] in Redactie De Morgen, 2017) or "an antivirus program against dogmatism" (Benzine [political scientist] in Struys, 2017b).

The authors turned each of the twelve frames into a cartoon, aimed at facilitating the conversations with the young people without stigmatization. Cartoon elicitation is a way to stimulate participants to see the different perspectives on a certain topic in a non-formal way. Three characteristics of the cartoons supported this goal. Firstly, humour has the potential to take the tension out of potential stigmatising topics. Secondly, cartoons are impersonal. Contrary to a picture, cartoons do not represent a concrete person or situation. Thirdly, a cartoon is less direct, creating distance and opportunity for interpretation between the image and reality. Before being presented the cartoons (for an overview of the cartoons, see Appendix C), the participants reflected upon the role of the media and their experience as being part of a 'suspect community' in a radicalisation era, followed by an elicited conversation guided by the cartoons. As such, the dominant perspectives on radicalisation in Belgium were discussed, as well as potential alternative (counter-)frames.

5.3.4 Getting access to the field

The authors reached out to several 'go-betweens' (e.g., youth workers, teachers in high schools or members of governmental institutions with a broad network in the field) to either connect the authors to a well-connected person, or to many young people at the same time. For ethical considerations, the authors were open about the research aim. However, the sensitivity and stigma of the term 'radicalisation' soon became clear: unanswered emails, scolding phone calls or being hung up on were frequent encounters. A fear for labelling and endangering young people as well as distrust towards information, based on previous experiences with academia and media. Although confidentiality, anonymity, transparency, and the wellbeing of the young people were key elements to the authors, included in the informed consent and the ethical approval of the concerned university, the sole mentioning of the research topic was often enough to block the conversation. As stated by Adeloye and colleagues (2019), the recruiting

process in a research on a sensitive topic may trigger feelings of suspicion: Who is the researcher working for? Why do they want to talk to that particular group?

Snowballing came with its own challenges: teenage behaviour resulted in last-minute cancelled meetings, experiences shared by colleagues researching non-sensitive topics. It is thus the interpretation of the authors rather than the topic; spending free time for something that gives them probably too little in return formed an obstacle.

5.4 Results

5.4.1 A personal interpretation of the dominant frames and alternative views

During the non-elicited conversation, some of the participants emphasised that "terrorists exist in every society, every population group". This comment immediately linked radicalisation to terrorism and thus violent acts. However, this rational reasoning was later contradicted when the concept of 'radicalisation' was discussed and spontaneously interpreted as 'Muslim-radicalisation'. Even when presenting the problematizing cartoons, the participants reasoned with a focus on Islam. It was only when alternative interpretations were shown that a discussion emerged on "being radical in your own way" even though "radicalisation is always linked to Islam".

When presenting the cartoon, *The freedom fighter* (see Appendix C), conversations sparked on the differences in treatment by media of certain population groups, and how radicalisation was only applied to specific communities. For example, it was discussed how "79 Jews left for Israel" to fight in the army, and whether "this could be seen as radicalism, or as serving in the army?". The Antwerp-group concluded that "You can't say it's radicalism about the Jews". This example is particularly relevant because the presented event—the departure of Jews to fight in a foreign army—involves Belgian citizens leaving the country to take part in a foreign war. Another cited example was the protests of the 'yellow vests' in France, a long-term and violent protest on economic concerns, which, after counter-frames as *Meaningfulness* or *The freedom fighter* were presented, the respondents said that it would fit those perspectives. However, according to the participants, the news media never report on "radical Flemings" but always link radicalisation to Islam. By referring to 'Flemings', they present a dominant in- and out-group perspective of Flemings versus non-Flemings, i.e. Islamic radicalised individuals.

By the illustration of the deproblematizing perspectives (e.g. counter-frames *Meaningfulness* and *The freedom fighter*), the participants recognised and discussed different types of radicalisation (e.g. Black Lives Matter or Jewish radicalisation), whereas before the focus was on 'Islam-radicalisation'. This strong focus, combined with a refutation of the insinuated responsibility of religion in 'radicalising', shows the relevance of problematizing frames that dominate public discourse. The youngsters seem to take as a given that radicalisation concerns *Islam*-radicalisation, a connection they objected when confronted with the cartoon by focusing on individual responsibility. The participants questioned the perspective on 'Islam-radicalisation' upon the introduction of the counter-frames. For example, when presented the *Virus* cartoon, a participant (one-on-one interview, Brussels) reacted to the stereotypical representation while he also mentioned: "It is true, people can be influenced by who is around them, but that depends on the person, who needs to have a critical mind-set".

5.4.2 Internalising dominant framing

The conversations made clear that the participants objected to dominant framing of radicalisation as an Islamic or regional problem in the public debate. The young people opposed the idea that radicalisation is linked to certain areas or to a certain religion. However, this objection of dominant causes and consequences interfered with the language use of the participants from Molenbeek and Antwerp. The terms and metaphors they applied reflected an internalisation of the dominant, problematizing framing of radicalisation. This was less apparent in the word use of the participants from Verviers. For example, one of the participants, in a discussion on the representation of Molenbeek, referred to the region as *"Jihadbeek"*. This word reflects the link made between areas in Belgium and radicalisation. It shows that the respondents incorporated stigmatising references in their language, albeit jokingly.

In the same way, the young people opposed the idea that radicalisation is linked to religion and specifically to Islam. When rationalizing, they made clear that according to them there is no causal connection between the two concepts. However, when in a group discussion, debating on potential causes and consequences of radicalisation, a participant said: "I don't believe you will become more religious if the police treats you badly, I don't think you'll start to pray more because you get arrested" (Participant in focus group Antwerp). Implicitly, radicalisation is then referred to as 'becoming more religious', while when rationally discussing this link, the participants questioned the connection between religion and radicalisation.

5.4.3 Distancing from 'radicalised' individuals

In the conversations with the young people, they continued to distance themselves from the concept of radicalisation. Although they argued that this issue did not apply to them, they do agree that it applies to others. As such, they perceive radicalisation as a largely unknown phenomenon. This is manifested in their problematization of radicalisation. In all conversations, radicalisation was defined as a problem that should be solved. Before they were introduced in the conversation by showing the corresponding cartoons, the participants did not suggest alternative perspectives (e.g. *The freedom fighter*). This problematization of radicalisation showed itself in two ways, by focusing on individual responsibility and by focusing on violence.

Firstly, radicalisation was defined as a consequence of "a problem with education" or "a form of manipulation". In both cases, the focus was on the individual level: a person is not critical enough, not educated enough to oppose potential groomers. Thus, according to the suspect community, radicalisation is also a consequence of 'being in the wrong crowd', hanging out with the wrong people and having the wrong friends. Additionally, the participants frequently pointed out that radicalisation is not linked to a neighbourhood, a religion or an ideology – a reaction towards the dominant perspectives they encounter: "If they would really know religion, they would not be there". The main conclusion seemed to be that radicalisation is the consequence of being uneducated and lacking a critical mind set. These excerpts are exemplary:

> "It's not a problem of origin or community. It's the person's fault. […] It doesn't matter if he lives in Molenbeek it's the person and his education." (Participant 1, interview, Brussels)

> "[…] These are ideas that their friends have put in their heads. […] And at a certain moment, yes, it's good. In fact, they're not basically bad. But people do not just say, out of nothing: "OK, I'll become a terrorist". […] It's like playing a PlayStation: they start him, they tell him, do this: he does it. He doesn't think for himself anymore." (Participant 3, interview, Brussels)

In the same way, if behaviour of someone close to the young people concerns them, they regarded it as unsuspicious opposed to when an acquaintance would show similar behaviour. For example, a participant shared the story of a close friend, recently converted, cutting off all contact with a non-Muslim friends. The participant explained: "I know him, I don't think he is radical. If he wasn't my best friend, and he would tell me this, for 70% I would believe he became radical". This observation demonstrates once again that the respondents explicitly

distance themselves of radicalisation. Behaviour is interpreted differently depending on the person establishing the behaviour.

Secondly, the respondents focused strongly on the disapproval of the use of violence. The participants took it as a given that radicalisation is linked to violence. The young people hold a primary focus on *violent* 'Islam-radicalisation', assuming that violence is what is understood by society as radicalisation. When discussing other forms of radicalisation (e.g. the example of Jewish people fighting in the Israeli army or the 'yellow vests'), the aspect of 'violence' remains crucial in the definition. In the conversations, the participants repeatedly stressed that they did not approve of a violent approach ("I could never agree with violence").

The approach of problematizing radicalisation continued after presenting the cartoons with potential counter-frames, which challenged the problematizing dominant views. For example, reflecting on the *Puberty* cartoon, the following participant takes into account the development of a critical mind set, albeit he adds the argument of manipulation and lack of education:

> "Yes, they [so-called radicalised individuals] are still growing up, and he [the radicalised person] is very malleable let's say. It is very easy to manipulate him […] he does not have this base. They [groomers] can make him believe whatever they want. Seeing he is a child, he does not have a developed critical mind set, and a basic education." (Participant 4, interview, Brussels)

The presentation of an alternative, deproblematizing perspective opens the opportunity for a deepening of the previous argument. Therefore in some cases, when the counter-frames were presented (e.g., *Resilience*), the participants could understand the context of the radicalised individual. However, according to all respondents, radicalisation in itself remained a problem to be solved.

By distancing radicalisation from neighbourhoods, religion or ideology and community, as well as stressing the disapproval of violence, the participants continued to make clear that they are not to be linked to 'radicalised individuals', despite being labelled as part of a suspect community. Additionally, the focus on the individual level when defining radicalisation, and simultaneously continuing to defend the local neighborhoods, might indicate a strong internal social cohesion in the communities. By localising responsibility on an individual level and opposing negative perspectives of the community, the collective identity of belonging to that community is secured.

5.4.4 Building an identity in a polarised society

The participants spontaneously reflected upon being part of a "suspect" community. On the one hand, they discussed how they feel treated differently. They experience discrimination based on their assumed religion, assumed migration background and the region they live in. For example, as said in one of the group conversations, a Moroccan child with ADHD would be labelled as a 'trouble kid', opposed to a "white child with ADHD who would be diagnosed as such and helped as should". On the other hand, reflections were made on the treatment as "dangerous individuals", when they are approached based on presuppositions. The mentioned incidents were interactions with either police, the media or in day-to-day life. Several similar examples are given in all conversations:

> A: "It's just if you say 'Borgerhout', then immediately…" – "Oh, that's a dangerous guy!"
>
> B: "Yeah, we had just seen a boxing movie and we were super active and we started to each other 'like this, like this' *[re-enacting the boxing movie]* and suddenly I saw two security [agents]… Yeah, someone had called or shouted that there was a fight going on… – A fight?! We're friends!" (*laughing*) (Focus group, Antwerp)

Similarly, the participants shared experiences of hostile interactions based on their religious identity. A woman (participant in focus group Antwerp) describes the encounters where her hijab is questioned by strangers. People ask her: "Why do you where this veil? Does your dad tell you to?" She does not understand why her dad is brought into the conversation while another participant mentions "My dad tells me to not wear it!". The group wonders, "when did dad become God?". Another question often asked is: "When will you be married off?". In securitized context, an important part of their identity, being religious, is repeatedly hostilely questioned.

During the group conversations, participants repeatedly joked about what another participant said, which (in the joke) might cause police to arrive on their doorstep. For example, one participant commenting on the *Clash of civilisations* perspective as being a correct definition of current society, received the comment: "Soon police will be at your door. 'I've heard you want to leave Belgium'". All started laughing, upon which one replied: "Yes, you're laughing, but …". In other conversations as well, a repeated focus on the researcher's recording of the conversation and the possibility for the police to listen in and search for the participants was present. Through humour, the feeling of suspicion and surveillance is reflected.

The discussions on being part of a suspect community, combined with discussing alternative perspectives led the conversations to a more contextualising debate on radicalisation. By presenting the cartoons of the counter-frames, the participants took into account vulnerabilities they did not mention before in the context of radicalising individuals (e.g. discrimination, police violence, racism). Reflecting upon these points, they did continue to underline the problematic aspects of radicalisation. So the cartoons thus gave them opportunity to consider different perspectives, but did not change the problematizing view on radicalisation. For instance, this participant reflected upon the experiences of racism and discrimination. He indicated that he could understand the context in which a person can radicalise, while disapproving—describing the actions as "nonsense" and "doing stupid things".

> "I can fully understand that [*revolting against discrimination and racism*]. […] Because there are some who do not feel safe. They know, however, they are doing stupid things, so it's normal that you're not safe, because you're doing silly things. [...] Sometimes the police do not help. I mean, police violence, sometimes it degenerates." (Participant 3, interview, Brussels)

The young people did not deproblematize radicalisation, in the sense that they saw it as less of a problem, but for example as a temporary phase with teenagers. What they did problematize, however, were the consequences of the attention for radicalisation. These are a menace to them and their social identity.

5.4.5 Fake news?

The young people were critical towards the news media on how they portray Arabs, Islam or 'radicalisation'. Media are said to portray Islam in a negative way, linking radicalisation to Islam. They also argue that when someone with a migration background or an Islamic background engages in criminal activity, this background will be focused on, whereas this does not happen in the case of positive engagement. This makes the participants feel alienated.

Furthermore, the young people described the discrepancy between the depiction of an area such as Molenbeek or Verviers and how they experience it. The image they get from the news (A: "Verviers, it's a city of terrorists, of jihadists"), does not match the experience they have when being part of this community (B: "City of terrorists but only two people left"), as the following excerpt demonstrates:

> A: "Well, yes, the media makes you think like 'you must Molenbeek ... I am going to think of fire coming out, and what more, but when you get there, that's just a normal neighbourhood…" (Focus group, Antwerp)

The participants criticised the obviousness with which the media apply this negative portrayal of areas and communities, and how they do not take into account the backfiring effects for the members of the (religious) community. The participants feel as if they have no power to counteract, as this participant explains:

> "The press, people outside of Molenbeek, when they speak off Molenbeek, it's to say bad things. […] with Salah and, *voilà*, we can't do anything. … There are terrorists everywhere, eh. Everywhere. In Molenbeek, in the US, terrorists, I don't know any country that doesn't have terrorists. It's not just Molenbeek." (Participant 4, interview, Brussels)

5.5 Discussion

Looking at how young people belonging to a 'suspect community' receive and interact with the dominant discourses on radicalisation, and how these might differ from their lived experiences as questioned in the second research question, the participants clearly defined radicalisation from a problematizing perspective. Without being confronted with the cartoons, which depicted the frames that prevail in public discourse on the subject, the young people saw radicalisation as a lack of sufficient education or as a form of manipulation of a weak person. In either case, radicalisation was seen as a problematic process at the individual level, in which religion or belonging to a community play no role. As a result, radicalisation is not deproblematized, as if respondents saw radicalisation as less of a problem. In this study, the members of the 'suspect community' did not speak out of a counter-framing perspective about radicalisation. This only happened when the cartoons were presented to them. However, the radicalisation discourse itself—as reflected in public debate and the news media, and the consequences on the participants and their social identity—was actually questioned.

The participants formulated critique on the media representation of Islam and people with a migration background, as well as on perceived discrimination. This confirms what already has been described in the literature (e.g., Bourabain et al., 2020). They experience a discrepancy between a represented reality and a lived reality. The presentation of radicalisation as linked to religion or communities does not line up with personal experiences of their neighbourhoods and communities. Moreover, as it was mentioned, the young people feel the impact of being part of a 'suspect community', when they are treated differently, or when they see how they are portrayed in the media. As such, the radicalisation debate and the departure of Syria fighters had a negative impact on them and their community. Their experiences voice a translation of mediatised securitisation to real life securitisation. This strong focus on 'the

radicalisation issue' and specifically a stigmatising view on Islam, youngsters with a migration background and certain areas in Belgium, can lead to the viewing of young people as potentially dangerous, which can result in discrimination and violent encounters with the police. There is thus a paradox when it comes to the radicalisation debate. On the one hand, the participants object to the stigmatising discourse because of the harmful consequences. On the other hand, radicalisation is spontaneously interpreted as 'Muslim radicalisation', so that the offered arguments are seen as fitting into the dominant radicalisation paradigm.

In identifying an 'us' and 'them' in the radicalisation debate, as addressed in RQ1, the young people distanced themselves from the concept of radicalisation, and of people who they or society would perceive as radicalised. They created an 'us' community, which differs from the individuals who are actually 'radicalised' and from the mainstream narrative. They did so by repeatedly objecting to the use of violence—thus confirming the view of radicalisation as a violent process—and by focusing on individual responsibility. With the latter, they explicitly did not link societal processes to radicalisation, for example, the neighbourhood people grew up in. In that way, they did not take down their communities and themselves.

The strategy of *distancing* is not uncommon when dealing with stigma. Research on for example poverty (Lott, 2002) or homosexuality (Swim et al., 1999) has indicated processes of distancing by talking about the stigmatised group in stereotypical ways, or by denouncing opinions declared by a member of that group. However, these studies have focused on the distancing of one group versus another (e.g., non-poor distancing from poor people) whereas in this research, society identifies the participants in the same group as the radicalised individuals. Hence, *in-group distancing* occurs, in similar ways as in previous research where a label or stigma was better defined (e.g., Aiello & McQueeney, 2016). As opposed to O'Loughlin et al. (2011), who argued that mainstream audiences distance themselves from society when it comes to defining radicalisation, and Cherney and Murphy (2016) who discuss internal distancing, in this study a *dual* distancing was observed. First, participants distanced themselves from so-called radicalised individuals, which might be part or have been part of their community, or at least of their neighbourhood. Second, they distanced themselves from a dominant public discourse on radicalisation that surrounds them and which is stigmatising and harmful to the community from which they derive their identity. There is thus a dual creation of 'us' and 'them'.

The processes of distancing, combined with the experiences of identity exclusion interplays with self-identity building. Earlier research discusses identity-building in a framework of negative media representation (Cherney & Murphy, 2016; Rolling & Bey, 2016). The members of the silenced overrepresented minority see their communities, their peers, negatively represented while they are not addressed as the target audience of these messages. Simultaneously, their identity is openly questioned in the public sphere in hostile ways. This drives a wedge between a mainstream narrative, which should support an inclusive imagined community (see Anderson, 1991), and a minority group. Cherney and Murphy (2016) addressed the importance of the suspect label for in-group identification, a factor in viewing oneself, personal religion and community. In consequence, a self-identity is built on the strong foundation of a close community. This group is targeted in mainstream messages, and urges a representation of oneself as non-violent in order to fit in with dominant expectations.

After being presented the cartoons, the perception of the concept of radicalisation did not change. By being confronted with alternative approaches to the perspectives that tend to dominate public discourse, the participants did indeed reflect upon them, considered the arguments and discussed about it. Ultimately, however, they maintained their original position. The different perspectives invited the participants to go beyond their initial answer and interpretation of radicalisation and to explore alternative insights. The applied methodology stimulated a more thought-trough argument of the initial stance. Thus, applying a broader overview of frames in for example media reporting would be a benefit to the public debate: It stimulates discussion, creates space for immersion and a more substantiated argumentation.

The language use shows an internalisation of a harmful framing which can indicate the influence of dominant discourses, although these are denounced, an aspect limitedly addressed in this study. When an unknown topic is narrated one-sidedly, it leaves a restricted vocabulary to discuss it. Moreover, previous research on racism has indicated the internalisation of racist discourses (Seet, 2019), implicating vocabulary, self-image and community perception. This finding can spur continued research on the internalisation of securitised discourse on radicalisation.

In circumstances in which a label is debatable, there is more to learn on how perceived members of a group deal with such identification. Focusing on dual distancing, a limitation of this study is the sole focus on a suspect community. Expanding insights of experiences with other silenced overrepresented minorities, for example, refugees and migrants, can deepen the

understanding of this phenomenon. The coping strategy of dual distancing opens up an interesting field for future research.

PART III: APPLICABILITY

Chapter 6. A practical guide building on fight, flee or fuse strategies to respond to polarising issues

This chapter suggests a number of specific communication strategies that can be used as a guideline when communicating about polarising topics such as migration, radicalisation and other antithetical issues. It presents a model of fight, flee and fuse response strategies and includes a hands-on guide to communicate about polarising issues without fuelling polarisation. It builds on research completed in Belgium, a small territory that has been the crossroad of current issues such as terrorism, transit migration, the perceived threat of radicalisation and rising political polarisation. The chapter offers concrete tools to counter these processes by bridging differences and building solidarity. In this way, the research paves the way for an inclusive and connecting communication approach, supporting a depolarised society.

6.1 Introduction

In recent years, the processes of othering and in-group/out-group thinking became prevalent in the context of refugees and Muslims (Jones, 2017). Tying in with these trends, news media have reported more negatively on Muslims in the aftermath of radical Islamist terrorist attacks in Western societies (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017). Instead of isolating extremists as the out-group, Western media have homogenously identified the Muslim community as "the other" (Demarest et al., 2020), fostering solidarity with individuals that share the same social identity, while the out-group is seen as more distant (Dunning & Harrison, 2010). This increases in-group identification and leads to a stronger 'us versus them' polarisation (Choma et al., 2015; Dawson, 2011; Lopes & Jaspal, 2015).

In-group sympathy and out-group antipathy in partisanship has been studied as affective polarisation (Wagner, 2020). With a main scholarly focus on the United States, partisanship has been essential in analysing polarisation. Going beyond issue-based polarisation, Iyengar and colleagues (2019) see a description of the other as hypocritical and closed-minded as a consequence of deriving social identity from partisanship (Huddy, 2001). The groups share a "common foe" and try to persuade neutral bystanders to join their camp (King & Anderson, 1971). This polarisation relates to an increase in tensions, possibility of rebellion and revolt and a general social unrest (Esteban & Ray, 1994). In multiparty systems, affective polarisation is not measured in positive versus negative partisanship, but through the social identification with one party (Wagner, 2020). However, in multiparty systems, the issue matters in the amount of polarisation (Johnson et al., 2020), for example, the issue of refugees is found to be most polarised leading to greater selective sharing, which can increase polarisation. Thus in a multiparty system, social identity is derived from positioning on an issue, rather than from partisanship.

In an online environment, high diversity in media sources urges selection by the consumer, which can lead to less diversity in consumption (Mutz & Martin, 2001), a media use steered by pre-existing attitudes (Stroud, 2008). Thus: there is a bigger pie to consume, while the patterns of consumption remain the same, meaning that an increase in consumption equals an increase in imbalanced political information (Lelkes et al., 2017). Being exposed to unbalanced content can lead to an identification with more extreme ideas (Levendusky, 2013), which can increase affective polarisation (Webster & Abramowitz, 2017), for example on

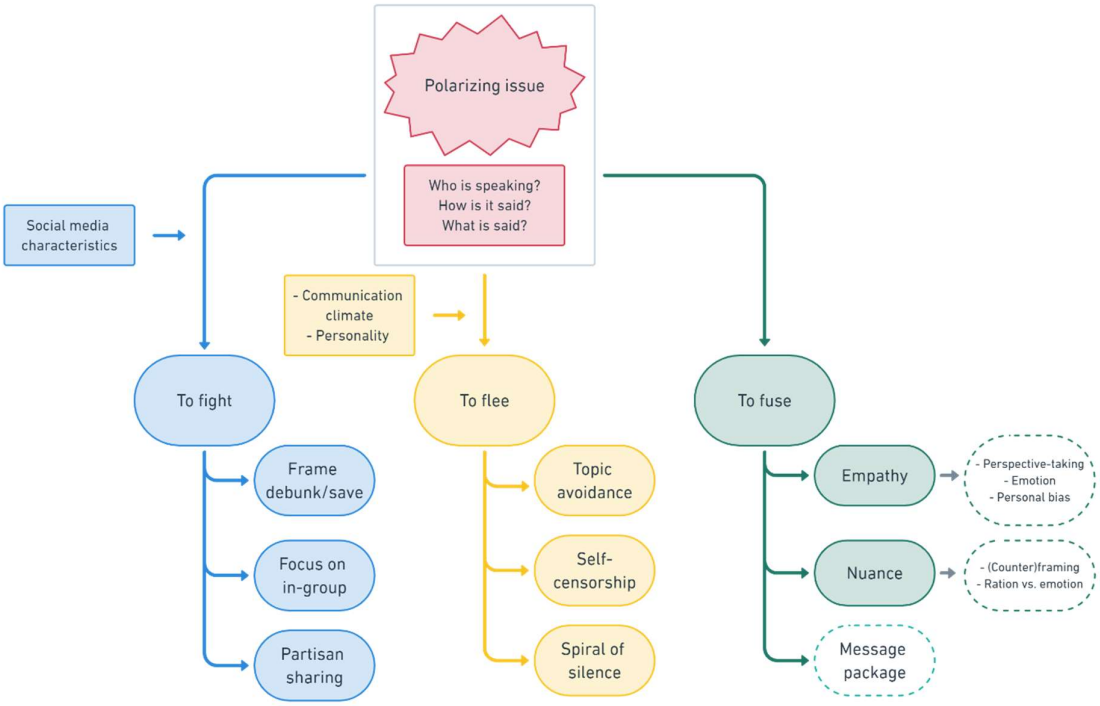
topics as pro-choice or pro-life (Yardi & Boyd, 2010), vaccinations (Walter et al., 2020), or Black Lives Matter versus All Lives Matter (KhudaBukhsh et al., 2020).

This contribution builds further on previous research that has focused on different strategies to respond to polarisation (e.g., Ahler & Sood, 2018; Iyengar et al., 2019). Learning from the proposed interventions and accomplished multi-method studies, this chapter adds several concrete guidelines to the existing literature.

6.2 Fight, flee or fuse strategies in literature

Different models focus on the emergence and fuelling of polarisation (e.g., Axelrod, 1997; Bramson et al., 2017; Rao & Steckel, 1991) however, they do not include the potential response strategies to a polarising issue. Researchers have focused on communication strategies that depolarise (e.g., Kahan et al., 2015), ignore (e.g., Matthes et al., 2018) or fuel a debate (e.g., McCaffrey & Keys, 2000). The overarching model presented in this chapter categorises strategies discussed in literature to deal with polarising topics in fight, flee and fuse actions (see Figure 8). The topics added in dotted line refer to insights from personal research, discussed in the section ‘Responding to polarising issues’.

Figure 8 An overview of the potential response strategies to a polarising issue, complemented with personal research.



6.2.1 To fight

A likely response to many when feeling attacked (e.g., when someone contradicts your opinion on something that you feel strongly about) is to counterattack (Richardson et al., 1998), potentially increasing polarisation. In an online environment, confrontational behaviour is stimulated by 'attention bulimia' (a hunger for likes) (Vicario et al., 2016). Social media fosters negative (Hills, 2019; Tsugawa & Ohsaki, 2015) and oversimplified messages (Vicario et al., 2016): negative tweets are spread (retweeted) 1.2 – 1.6 times faster than neutral or positive messages (Tsugawa & Ohsaki, 2015). Character constraints might fuel polarisation (Schweighofer, 2018). Additionally, McCaffrey and Keys (2000) build on framing theory, to be understood as the highlighting of certain aspects of reality, introducing a perspective on an issue with a specific problem definition, cause and solution (Entman, 1993). The researchers distinguish three competitive framing strategies–ways to respond to opposing frames–namely: frame debunking (disprove the other frame), frame saving (defend the own frame) and polarisation-vilification (discrediting adversaries) (McCaffrey & Keys, 2000). When it comes to being confronted with a negative representation of oneself, for example of refugees, minorities can challenge the dominant perspective by creating their own (visual) media content (Leurs et al., 2018).

Wojcieszak and Garrett (2018) conclude that by focusing on national identity, thus fostering in-group solidarity, the perceived out-group can be negatively viewed. Most of the online discussions take place among people with similar political views (Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009). The online space plays into selective exposure (Lelkes et al., 2017), with individuals conducting partisan sharing – share like-minded news articles and avoid conflicting ones (An et al., 2014). These processes interplay with the creation of echo chambers, polarised groups with participants that share the same belief system (Vicario et al., 2016). Buder et al. (2021) found not the environment on Twitter to influence polarisation, but rather the personal expression of negativity. They believe that the effects of the encountered messages can be higher on other social networks (e.g., Facebook or LinkedIn) as those might be more personal or professional interactions compared to Twitter.

6.2.2 To flee

Being confronted with a polarising topic and opinions other than their own, people might try to avoid the tension and ignore the conflict. Avoidance then is not a passive response, but rather 'goal-directed behaviour' (Wang et al., 2012). In case of *topic avoidance*, people avert conversations on certain topics to protect the relationship (Afifi & Guerrero, 2000). Research on interacting with people with a disagreeing opinion has indicated several strategies to censor one's own opinion (Hayes, 2007). A hostile climate (where people expect the receivers of their message to disagree) triggers more avoidance strategies than a friendly climate (Matthes et al., 2018), as well as certain topics (e.g., SUV destruction, affirmative action and death penalty) (Hayes, 2007). People who are already conflict avoidant are less likely to talk about such issues (Jang et al., 2014). This process continues in an online environment, with self-censoring when encountering a perceived hostile climate (Gearhart & Zhang, 2014, 2015).

These results are in line with the *spiral of silence* theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1993), suggesting that when people perceive their opinion as unpopular, they will be less likely to voice that opinion in fear of becoming socially isolated or negatively evaluated. This approach assumes that people scan around the room, for example by monitoring social media (Gearhart & Zhang, 2014), to measure what opinions are prevalent and then adapt censoring strategies (Matthes et al., 2018) in case these opinions diverge from their own. This process results in the silencing of minority opinions. In polarised environments, people with a more neutral perspective or a nuanced opinion might feel forced to either take sides or to remain silent, resulting in a silent majority and vocal minorities. Research by Mustafaraj and colleagues (2011) shows that a majority who disagrees with a minority opinion, will adjust their opinions

to the minority standpoint. They do so because the majority believes that the minority opinion is the norm and they wish to be included. However, there are individual differences: "avant garde" minorities or "hard-core" individuals who are unwilling to conform or remain silent (Noelle-Neumann, 1974). These individuals on the one hand get used to a feeling of isolation, and on the other hand actively seek out a congruent opinion climate as support, for example through friends. The importance of an issue can amplify the civic duty over the willingness to self-censor (Gearhart & Zhang, 2014).

6.2.3 To fuse

Existing research that focused on overcoming polarisation is suggesting a number of strategies to counter these tendencies by aiming to connect the different conversation partners. These approaches can be divided in two subcategories: empathy and nuance.

Firstly, looking at *nuance*, in the content of the message, Iyengar and colleagues (2019) suggest to overcome polarisation by making the in-group identity less salient, and focusing more on other aspects of identity. Ahler and Sood (2018) advocate to correct misperceptions about the out-group in order to minimize the intergroup social distance. Research by Zoizner and colleagues (2020) indicates that a focus on the strategy of the other party results in a decrease in out-party hostility and thus reduces affective polarisation. Kahan et al. (2015) add to bringing in nuance by advocating for a combination of information content and cultural meanings.

Secondly, attention for the *empathy* in a message can stimulate connection. Focusing on other-orientation (Redmond, 2018), perspective-taking can be seen as a form of empathy and has a cognitive and an affective component. Perspective-taking is seen as a cognitive ability that "involves nonegocentrically orienting oneself to another perspective rather than to one's own" (Eisenberg et al., 1994). Cognitive perspective taking refers to the competence of comprehending the thought process of someone else, while affective perspective taking incorporates the capability of recognizing another person's feelings (Oswald, 1996). Richardson and colleagues (1998) looked at the relationship between perspective-taking and aggressive responses via computer messages, and found that perspective-taking was linked to less aggression as well as more positive and less negative responses.

Building upon empathy and perspective taking, scholars have stimulated more positive intergroup contact to reduce prejudice (Miles & Crisp, 2014) by adhering to the contact hypothesis (Pettigrew, 1998), namely that "positive interaction between members of different

groups tends to reduce intergroup prejudice" (McKeown & Dixon, 2017). An extensive meta-analysis suggests that nearly 94% of the studies on contact theory evidence a negative relationship between contact and prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Not only direct contact, but also story telling (Husnu et al., 2018) or imagined contact (Crisp & Turner, 2009), all leaning on empathy, foster the decrease in prejudice. Specifically looking at intergroup contact on ethnic relations, Yehuda (1969) points out that favourable conditions (cooperative vs. competitive, equal status, etc.) indeed might reduce prejudice, however, unfavourable conditions may result in the opposite: increased intergroup polarisation. Applying a perspective-taking approach, Vescio, Sechrist and Paolucci (2003) saw that participants stimulated to take the outsiders stance reported a more positive intergroup attitude.

Building on studies of the role of negative emotions in polarisation (Lu & Lee, 2019; Vasilopoulos et al., 2019), Yu and colleagues (2021) aimed to alter the approach to positive emotions and tested (with no effect) whether incidental happiness (unrelated to the issue at hand) would let people respond differently to polarised, disagreeing messages. The authors do indicate that focusing on emotion related to the outgroup (thus related to the issue at hand) would have likely influenced the outcome (Yu et al., 2021). However, the attention for emotion in polarisation research is legitimate considering the feelings of anger and distrust towards the outgroup (Billig & Tajfel, 1973) combined with feelings of anxiety to share opinions in a hostile environment (Matthes et al., 2018). Additionally, the language sentiment and (im)politeness influences polarisation (Blitvich, 2010; Buder et al., 2021) as it can lead to digital emotion contagion, the adoption of emotions encountered on digital media (Goldenberg & Gross, 2020). The use of moral-emotional language (for example, expressing moral anger) impacts the spread of messages on Twitter (Brady et al., 2019), as negative threads appear to prevail more (Chmiel et al., 2011).

6.3 Progressive insights

The presented literature has provided multiple potential response strategies towards polarising issues, categorised in fight, flee or fuse strategies. Research on perspective-taking (e.g., Vescio et al., 2003) indicates the value of adopting another person's viewpoint in reducing polarisation and prejudice, stimulating more positive intergroup relations. This process allows for the questioning of the own perspective and learning more about the reasoning of someone else, thus explicating the relativity of a personal viewpoint. By doing this, it is made clear that different perspectives carry truth. However, to know more about what those potential different

perspectives can be, the presented contribution builds on (counter-)framing theory (Entman, 1993). Each frame presents a different perspective, where frames offer a problematizing viewpoint and counter-frames look at an issue with a deproblematizing outlook. Cognitive and affective perspective taking have been found to moderate framing effects (Fagley et al., 2010). A combination of frames and counter-frames in communication makes way for a broader debate as well as stimulate different groups to look at an issue from the perspective of 'the other'. In that way, framing and counter-framing have a connecting and bridging potential in a polarised environment.

Building on five studies researching polarising topics – migration, radicalisation and multicultural society – (Van Gorp, Van Hove, Figoureux & Vyncke, 2020; Van Gorp, Figoureux, & Vandekeybus, 2018; Van Gorp, Figoureux, & Vyncke, 2018 combined with Chapter 2–5 of the dissertation), this chapter presents a practical toolkit to respond to polarisation, adding to the three main strategies of fight, flee or fuse. All three topics can be considered as polarising topics: topics "you can't talk about at work" (Winters, 2017). They are topics that spur strong emotions, trigger divide and endanger inclusion.

The research was conducted in Belgium, a country with a multiparty system and a strong linguistic divide between Francophone and Flemish regions, which is reflected in a linguistic divided media use representing linguistically divisive issues (Sinardet, 2013). The country has known intensive debate on both topics considering on the one hand its geographical location, Belgium is an important transit country for migration to the United Kingdom (Derluyn & Broekaert, 2005) as well as a popular secondary migration destination (Hoon et al., 2020): people arriving at the borders of the European Union often continue their travels to the heart of the continent. On the other hand, Belgian citizens have both left the country to go fight in Syria (a process labelled 'radicalisation') and been linked to the terrorist attacks in Paris (2015) and Brussels (2016).

The suggested guidelines are based on multiple multi-method studies. The different prevailing perspectives in the public debate on migration, radicalisation and multicultural society have been mapped via inductive framing analyses (Chapters 2 and 3; Van Gorp, Figoureux, & Vandekeybus, 2018). A deductive analysis has added the overview of the prevalence of the frames on migration (Chapter 2). A qualitative study combining in-depth interviews with focus groups sheds light on the experiences of a suspect community with the dominant security framing of radicalisation (Chapter 5). This results in communication advice

to members of the suspect community on tools that can facilitate storytelling and being heard, as well as to stakeholders that search for inclusive communication towards these young people. An online experiment looked into the perception of the different frames by the Flemish public, as well as the role of the source (Van Gorp, Figoureux, & Vyncke, 2018). This study clarifies the role of the source on social networks, and the translation of (counter-)frames to the characteristics of social media.

The multi-method approach of these studies enables perspective taking, to look at migration and radicalisation from different viewpoints and thus learning in multiple ways. The studies involved collaboration with several partners with divergent interests (e.g. academia, policy, youth workers, and midfield organizations), enhancing insights in various needs of stakeholders. The following section builds further on the presented literature by adding focus on message packaging, nuance and empathy in the fuse approach and further exploring the fight and flee strategies. Firstly, these different aspects will be concretely discussed in light of the insights of the conducted research. Secondly, an overview of applied research offers inspiration to different stakeholders: media, pressure groups and (minoritized) citizens.

6.4 Responding to polarising topics

When reflecting on how to communicate on a polarised topic, three factors should be taken into account. Firstly, *who* is speaking plays a role in determining the strategy. Different stakeholders have different interests, and thus might apply different strategies. Additionally, society assigns roles and issues to these stakeholders, which can influence the interpretation of a message. When an NGO communicates in a nuanced way on migration, for example the following statement by 11.11.11 “In order to fight human trafficking […] legal migration routes are needed”, it is read in the perception of NGOs as “ferry service” (Twitter, 2019a). The role of a non-governmental organization might however be to demand attention for a certain topic and stimulate debate, where they can prefer a *fight* modus. In contrast, a governmental institution predominantly aims to address the entire population in a connecting way, and might prefer to look for strategies in the fuse category. A politician can choose to ignore a certain topic, for example, when it is not the focal point of the party and thus attention for the topic (e.g., migration) will not be in the party’s favour. Some politicians centre themselves on certain themes, which adds to how their communication on the issue will be perceived. For example, in Flanders, former Secretary of State for Asylum and Migration Theo Francken created debate with his Facebook post on “#opkuisen” [cleanup] (Francken, 2017) the Maximiliaanpark, then

a lodging for refugees in Brussels. Many people spoke out against the hashtag use, asking how people could be 'cleaned up' (Arnoudt, 2017).

Secondly, *how* a message is delivered interplays with the strategies. As research indicated, social media characteristics can stimulate a competitive, negative environment (Tsugawa & Ohsaki, 2015; Vicario et al., 2016) or lead the majority into silence (e.g., Mustafaraj et al., 2011). The choice of platform thus intersects with the strategies. On social media, it might be taking a more conscious choice to adopt a *fuse* strategy rather than *fight,* whereas in interpersonal communication, in a context of knowing and in person-interacting with people, less aggressive strategies might be preferred (Winters, 2017).

Thirdly, *what* is said characterizes a strategy. For example, when focusing on nuance and empathy in a message, one is applying a more connecting communication. The medium plays a role too: in a 280 character Tweet, social media users are less able to bring in nuance than in a non-limited Facebook post. Similarly for journalists, the length of an article can either give opportunity to approach a topic from different angles, or to limit it to a singular perspective. Especially in an online environment, the consumption model stimulates strategies to attract readers, such as clickbait articles (Beleslin & Njegovan, 2017). For example, the title of a lengthy article read as: "The unsolvable problem of Theo Francken" (Bervoet, 2018), presenting migration as an impossible dilemma. What followed was an elaborate nuanced explanation of the different factors the Secretary of State needs to take into account – a different story than what the title assumes. All three characteristics are to bear in mind when contemplating the different strategies, addressed here with insights from the five performed studies.

The different strategies are discussed from the perspective of the communicating stakeholder, which can alter from a citizen to a pressure group, media or policy. Similarly, the communication context in which they are applied differs, from interpersonal communication or discussion, to social media use, or mass-spread messages such as news articles or the self-representation of an organization.

6.4.1 To fight

In line with the strategy of frame debunking and saving (McCaffrey & Keys, 2000), a deductive framing analysis on 'migration and refugees' (Van Gorp, Van Hove, Figoureux & Vyncke, 2020) strived to include a count on the 'deframing' of frames, a synonym for frame debunking, thus contradicting a presented frame. In the case of deframing, the argument or word-use of a

frame is contradicted. An example is: "I contradict the feeling that migration is uncontrollable" (Goossens & Goethals, 2018). In this case, the quoted person wants to contradict a certain perspective on migration, however, by mentioning the 'uncontrollability' of migration, this image might be triggered in the mind of the audience (Lakoff, 2004). Deframing/debunking of frames might thus be enforcing existing frames. However, Vyncke and Van Gorp (2020) evidence the value of deframing strategies on topics where certain ideas are prevalent (e.g., the presentation of migrants as profiteers). In countering dominant narratives, as proposed by Leurs et al. (2018), opportunity lies in creating personal content and thus personal narratives, also referred to as reframing. For example, discussing migration from a *Win-win* perspective without reference to – and thus potential reinforcing of – opposing views could result in the following formulation of a short message: "Our country urgently needs to compensate for its aging population by harnessing migration. Everyone can benefit. The labour shortage begs for this workforce. Migration: the key to greater prosperity" (Van Gorp, Figoureux, & Vyncke, 2018, p. 12).

Additionally, based on the mapping of the different (counter-)frames (Chapter 2 and 3), experimental research (Van Gorp, Figoureux, & Vyncke, 2018) and validation interviews (Van Gorp, Van Hove, Figoureux & Vyncke, 2020) certain (counter-)frames have been identified as more polarising. In an online experiment, which was aimed at testing the validity and credibility of (counter-)frames on migration via tweets, demonstrated that the *The hostile intruder* frame (a perspective that defines migrants and refugees as dangerous villains) as most straightforward and hence most clear, leaving, however, little room for nuance. It is thus an easy applicable frame on social media, which stimulates simplified messages over complex frames. The validation interviews with experts on the topic of migration categorised eight (counter-)frames as potentially polarising, of which three were also seen as stigmatising (see Van Gorp, Van Hove, Figoureux & Vyncke, 2020, p. 52). Thus, not only problematizing frames contribute to polarisation, deproblematizing counter-frames can also add fuel to the debate. For example, the perspective of the *The innocent victim* (migrants and refugees as helpless victim of circumstances) offers a one-sided view on migration, categorizing critical people as heartless or inhumane. Typical word use is "needy", "saved" or "surviving" (see Chapter 2). Additionally, migrants and refugees are stigmatised by portraying them as incapable of helping themselves, the everlasting victim. Other counter-frames such as *We are all humans* (solidarity based on shared humanity) are labelled polarising because of their vagueness, naivety and abstractness. For example, many people will agree to the argument "A lot of migrants, refugees

or people without papers will not excel in heroic acts, cooking or study skills. But they too, deserve a humane life." (Schepers, 2018). However, the discussion then raises whose responsibility it is to guarantee this humane life, and how to organise this practically. Does this mean open borders? In the current migration debate, similar reasoning is deemed idealistic.

6.4.2 To flee

An online experiment, testing tweets with multiple frames, provided some support for a number of tendencies as described in the literature (Van Gorp, Figoureux, & Vyncke, 2018). An evaluation of the different perspectives of migration in this experimental study, provided indications of a preference of the Flemish for the *The innocent victim* perspective when looking at migration, with some doubts on feasibility. However, when taking into account which tweets the respondents would consider retweeting, the *The innocent Victim* frame was the only one that was retweeted significantly less than the not related tweet in the control condition. So even though the respondents indicated a preference for the narrative, they were less eager to share this with their online community. These results are in line with research on self-censorship (Hayes, 2007) in the context of a hostile environment (Matthes et al., 2018), thus assuming the participants perceived the context as hostile.

Similarly, the conversations with the young people (see Chapter 5) indicated a form of self-censorship when it came to discussions on radicalisation, multicultural society or religion. Even though such topics were of interest to them, the participants addressed that these topics were not discussed among friends or avoided in work atmosphere, which relates to research on topic avoidance (e.g., Afifi & Guerrero, 2000). Alternative strategies to handle such topics are discussed in the subsequent section 'Applying research to practice'.

6.4.3 To fuse

The focus of the performed studies has been to identify potential bridging communication tools. The majority of the communication advice is thus centred within a category that aims to connect opposing poles. Within the different subcategories–empathy, nuance and message packaging–the results of the different studies offer additional insights.

Empathy

Building upon contact theory (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) and perspective-taking strategies (Richardson et al., 1998), the performed studies based on (counter-)framing theory make way for placing oneself in someone else's shoes. The conversations with members of the 'suspect community' on radicalisation (see Chapter 5) offered opportunity for this method. In Chapter

4, the methodology of cartoon elicitation is elaborately described. Concretely, a potential exercise to stimulate perspective taking can be a group conversation. The participants can be youth (workers), journalists, or any other stakeholder who is dealing with the issue at hand. In such activity, elicitation material is used to stimulate conversation on the different perspectives. This can be visual (e.g., photos selected by participants, cartoons, a selection of TV material) or textual (e.g., fragments from news articles, tweets) material. The conversation leader can stimulate perspective taking through the presentation of this material by asking questions such as: Why would someone present the issue in this way? What would the arguments be? Why do you think someone reasons from this perspective? By considering these steps and stimulating reflection on the thinking patterns of people who are using certain perspectives, participants are encouraged to look beyond a narrative. The exercise of looking at an issue via different perspectives provide more insight into another person's arguments. Such exercises are not aimed at an alternation of personal viewpoints, but to stimulate understanding for persons with another viewpoint and the capability to perceive issues from a different perspective, even when one does not agree with that perspective.

Apart from bringing understanding to another person's viewpoint, gaining insight in alternative (counter-)frames by previously mentioned exercises sheds light on personal bias. All people have a personal bias, namely a worldview constructed by the circumstances they grew up in, the education they received, the people they interacted with. Mainstream framing plays its own role in this context. Based on the conversations in Chapter 5, there are indications of *internalisation* of dominant framing on radicalisation, even when that framing is stigmatising or harmful for the group that is internalising it. This relates to self-stigma, when outsider's stigmatization influences individuals socially and psychologically (Bos et al., 2013). When dealing with stigmatising media content, Vyncke (2020) categorised four coping mechanisms: media avoidance, refuting and reframing statements, undermining the source and diminishing the intent to stigmatise. The participants of the radicalisation study (Chapter 5) gave no indication of diminishing the intent to stigmatise, rather there were notions of belief that stigmatization was intentional. Statements were refuted and some participants mentioned to avoid media content.

The exercise discussed before not only stimulates insights in the perspectives of other people, but also in personal narratives: What are my own arguments? Why do I define the issue in this particular way? What factors influence my personal view? Where does it come from? How much is it 'fixed' and am I willing to revise it, or to stand up for my personal point-of-

view? How important is this subject to me? Who do I talk to about this topic, and do I avoid it with others? Why is that?

In the context of interpersonal communication, a confrontation with alternative perspectives and with the arguments and emotions these perspectives are built upon, can indicate a personal bias. For example, when a person reasons from an 'open border' perspective, constructively confronting them with the arguments of a *The hostile intruder* perspective can create understanding for the want and longing for small, recognizable communities, potential bad previous experiences or fear of losing what is known. When aiming to fuse, it is essential upon introducing this frame to ensure to refrain from strong language (e.g., "potential terrorists", "multicultural hell") but address feelings of unsafety, express concerns (e.g., "my village looks different than when I grew up and it makes me afraid for my children"). This creates an opportunity for the communicating stakeholder to probe: What exactly are you afraid of? Do you have experiences that make you feel this way? In the other direction, an 'open border' perspective in such conversation does not need to stress the open border aspect, but can introduce elements such as shared humanity in search for common ground in the conversation.

The most polarising perspectives contain the most emotion (for a ranking of frames according to emotionality, see Chapter 2). For example, in the migration debate, the *The hostile intruder* perspective builds upon feelings of fear, which can result in anger. *The innocent victim* counter-frame contains feelings of solidarity and empathy and proclaims the opposite actions to the first perspective. Not diminishing these feelings ("you are wrong to fear newcomers" or "you are naïve for wanting to help") but rather acknowledging them ("I understand you feel this way, however I feel differently because …") can support rapprochement between conversation partners.

Nuance

Looking at the content of the message, research inspired to make certain aspects of reality more salient and others less (Iyengar et al., 2019) while correcting misperceptions about the other (Ahler & Sood, 2018). Framing and counter-framing theory is based on the idea of looking at reality from different angles, and giving attention to different aspects of 'the other' as well as one's own identity. It inspires insights on the combination of frames and counter-frames, a shared identity and the balance between ratio and emotion.

A first focal point is the combination of frames and counter-frames when aiming to communicate nuanced and connectively. By combining arguments from multiple (counter-)frames, an initial step is made towards the conversation partner. For example, when discussing migration from a singular *Taking back control* frame, a reasoning could look like this: "We need to control borders for an efficient migration management and put a stop to the uncontrolled influx of refugees". Reasoning from this perspective and a fight strategy, there is nothing wrong with this statement: this is what the actor supports and wants to address. However, in a fuse strategy, a combination of (counter-)frames invites others to join the discussion, look at the issue with attention to different factors and broadens the debate. In that case, the *Taking back control* frame could be combined with the *Taking back the money* and *Win-win* perspective: "The current migration policy is inefficient and costs a lot of money to the welfare state. Attracting newcomers that can fill the labour shortages could create a more dynamic and beneficial migration reality to all".

A second point of attention is a shared identity. Iyengar and colleagues (2019) suggested to focus on a shared identity rather than the differences between groups, in the context of the United States an 'American identity'. However, translating this to a Belgian context and the polarised issues here at play (migration, radicalisation, multicultural society), this approach can fuel polarisation rather than counter it: a focus on 'Belgian identity' stimulates debate on who is Belgian and who is not. Rather, the counter-frame *We are all human* (Van Gorp, Van Hove, Figoureux & Vyncke, 2020) can be a solution to this issue. The perspective focuses on a shared identity, seeing the similarities in hopes and concerns in people from different backgrounds. This translates to the following type of message: "Every man is equal. With or without papers. A man has rights just because he is man" (Maréchal, 2019). However, this counter-frame can be perceived as naive and rather vague when it remains on an ideological level. Most people will not contradict the fact that people are equal, but believe that some form of bureaucratic system that offers border control is necessary. Therefore, translating *We are all human* to the practical level could result in a statement as this one: "There is a need for a humane welcome of *all* newcomers, regardless of papers after which a righteous policy guides them to the right institutions". Additionally, a proposition can be to bring people into contact based on shared needs.

Lastly, nuance can be brought in by weighing ratio versus emotion in the arguments and word use of the frames. Certain frames are more rational than others (for a ranking of frames according to emotionality, see Chapter 2). The *Win-win* perspective presents economic

arguments, versus *The innocent victim* that builds upon an emotional reasoning to support solidarity. The *Taking back control* frame (balancing a humane approach versus the feasibility of migration policy), *Taking back the money* frame (an economic calculation of migration) or *Win-win* counter-frame (migration as an economic gain for all stakeholders) are perceived as non-polarising perspectives in the validation interviews (Van Gorp, Van Hove, Figoureux & Vyncke, 2020). These frames reason with less emotion and from a distant outlook. Especially the *Taking back control* frame seems to be able to connect stakeholders on different positions on the political spectrum. However, the *Taking back control* frame can rely on dehumanizing language use such as "illegals-carousel" (reducing all newcomers to one profile), "aanzuigeffect" [intake effect] or "absorption rate". The frame has a spectrum of lexical choices, and not only applies such terminology but also adheres to vocabulary such as "migration management" or "coherent border policy". This points at the importance of message packaging.

Message packaging

A message is not conveyed in a vacuum, but its packaging interacts with how the message will be received. In the studies this contribution builds upon, framing is interpreted as an essential part of the social construction of reality. Aspects such as language (word use, metaphors), visuals, source and humour interact with reality. The ways in which a topic is discussed, co-creates the ways in which this topic is thought about. For example, if radicalisation is continuously described as a contagious disease (see Chapter 3), fear is spread about areas where 'radicalised individuals' live, who they have talked to, their families. In a news article, authors refer to the "need for a diagnose and remedy" (Pardoen, 2017) for the "symptoms of radicalisation" (Zuallaert & Van Humbeeck, 2016). Isolation is a solution to the "contamination risk" (Raspoet, 2016). The "spreading cancer" needs to be "destroyed with cuts, and radiation. Hurtful for the patients, but necessary" (Van Horenbeek & Muylaert, 2017).

<u>Language</u>

Language is key in message packaging. Every (counter-)frame is characterized by specific metaphors or word use (Van Gorp, 2007b), so with every frame, the specific word use changes. For example, the *Taking back control* frame on migration can be recognized by the use of water metaphors. Formulations as "an unstoppable flood of people", "a stream" or "need for better irrigation" refer to the chaotic current management of migration and the need for a more rational, cooperative model. However, while using these terms, people who are fleeing are referred to in anonymizing, generalizing and dehumanizing terms. In the context of the *Taking*

back control frame, it is advised (with the eye on depolarising communication) to build upon the frame's arguments and refrain from this specific language. Alternative word use for the water metaphor could be "a rise in the arrival of newcomers", "population movement" and "an imbalance between arrivals and departures". Aiming to express the worry over lack of coordination and the need for cooperation could be expressed by terms as "coordinated effort" or "a mismanaged event".

The complexity of language is expressed in the search for a term that describes "people with a migration background" without othering. Working on communication guidelines on 'multicultural society' in The Netherlands (Van Gorp, Figoureux, & Vandekeybus, 2018) a variety of terms appeared in the data, among others: non-western migrants, 'allochtonen' [foreign-born], non-white Dutch, Moroccan Dutch, Dutch Moroccans, people with an Islamic background, new Dutch. A similar search is present in Flanders, where the word 'allochtoon' regularly is the subject of debate as it refers to someone not born in the country of residence although also applied to "second or third generation migrants". It thus implies that someone never becomes a Flemish resident, similarly with "second or third generation migrant" as to what point does one remain a migrant and when does one become a belonging citizen? Similarly, the term 'migrant' is not neutral, as there lies power in determining who is a migrant and who is not.

In search of non-labelling terms, a general categorisation has been made between "newcomers" (people arriving to a country) and "Flemings" (people born in Flanders). In the case someone wants to (for example, in research) refer to people with roots in other countries than Belgium, the term "people with a migration background" has been coined. As for now, this appears to be a neutral reference. However, language changes, and the connotation to words can alter into a labelling, as has happened to the 'allochtoon', 'gastarbeider' [guest worker], or 'vreemdeling' [stranger] terms. More inclusive terms deem to be longer, and sometimes journalists, who are stuck to word limits, still use the term 'allochtoon' (e.g., Brinckman, 2021) and it is also used by some people with a migration background to describe themselves (e.g., Fieremans & De Cnodder, 2021). Alternatively, "mensen van kleur" [people of colour] has been used to refer to people whose skin colour has been defining for their experiences. On the one hand, the term 'people of colour' seems to imply that white is not a colour, and leads to the question if this term indicates a power imbalance. On the other hand, the term is solely focused on the experiences of skin colour and racism in the Western world. "People with a migration background" questions the minority–majority opposition in which

racism might root, for example in Asian or African societies. Additionally, it includes the experiences of among others Italian or East-European migrants in Belgium who are not considered "of colour". The need for categorisation, for example in academia or media, to designate groups in society, for example to discuss structural difficulties (e.g., discrimination) leads to the need for a descriptive term. However, there seems to be no consensus term, and the question is: is a term really necessary? The interaction between language, thus framing, and reality helps shape that reality. From a social constructionist perspective, language not only represents an objective reality, it also creates it. Through this synergy, labelling and creating terms can thus interact with reality and construct categories rather than solely *name* them.

This discussion is linked to the debate on the use of the Dutch terms "wit" and "blank" to describe white people. "Blank" is said to trace back to Belgium's colonial past, referring to innocence and purity, with a positive connotation, and in opposition to black, often enslaved, people (Wat Wat Vlaanderen, 2021). As the meaning of the word "blank" could be interpreted as 'empty' [blanco], it also does not refer to a colour, nor a skin colour, and is thus perceived as assuming that white people do not have a skin colour, establishing the norm. Thus, the term "wit" is proposed as alternative, as it is a (skin) colour. Opponents (e.g., Pauwels, 2018) argue that "blank" refers to the colour of the skin, without any connotations to a colonial past nor any side intentions and protest a form of 'moral superiority' condemning people that still use the word "blank". Some people respond with so-called colour-blindness, stating that they do not see colour but people. This is then again contested; as such viewpoint would ignore both the colonial past and current structural inequalities. The quest for the most appropriate terms indicates a difficult consensus on which terms are suited and which are not.

Discussions such is this one, raise a lot of friction in society as, for some, it feels as censorship when others claim which words can be used and which cannot. There is potentially a feeling of unease not knowing 'where this will end'. There are words and traditions that people have used daily without conscious negative connotation, and comments on these might feel directed at the wrong persons: "I never meant any harm, and I am clearly not a racist, why am I being attacked on this?". At the same time, people addressing issues with language or other topics (e.g., cultural products, certain traditions, or humour) might not have the intention to make this personal; however, these conversations might easily become personal. They seem to refer to traditions, to a collective identity.

Addressing words as “allochtoon” and “blank” are about questions of belonging and, at the same time, putting these words up for debate feels as a (personal) attack or insult. On the other hand, it is also about rethinking the norm, and questioning majority positions and personal bias. For example, a broadly shared perspective is that equal opportunities and diversity are important, combined with a highly competitive meritocracy. Reaching high positions is then all credit to one’s own merit. However, as addressed in the study on multicultural society (Van Gorp, Figoureux, & Vandekeybus, 2018), starting positions are different for everyone, thus not everyone starts from the same equal position. As this example shows, interactions with different perspectives uncover blind spots in personal perspectives. One can be convinced of a meritocracy, but through conversations about the experiences of others, learn about hurdles that some face and others do not. Thus, opening up to alternative viewpoints can disclose personal bias. Sometimes, challenging dominant narratives happens through provocation, or can only be realized through provocation. On the one hand, this can be positive for attaining the stakeholders goal (namely, achieving change), by creating debate and awareness. In the end, these conversations can lead to consensus and more insight in other people’s experiences as well as point to a personal bias. On the other hand, through provocation, it is possible that potential bystanders feel offended (e.g., by a focus on the use of “blank” versus “wit”) and feel less empathy for addressed concerns, and a socio-economic emancipation.

Source

A second part of the message package is the source of the message, thus the person or institution communicating. Focusing on a social media context, in the online experiment on Twitter (Van Gorp, Figoureux, & Vyncke, 2018), attention was given to the influence of the communicator on the perception of the message. The results indicate that an influential politician, with perceived expertise on a topic, gets more credit for whatever he says. In this case, the researchers did not incorporate gender as a variable, however earlier research indicated that older males are perceived the most credible (Weibel et al., 2008). Continuous research on this topic could incorporate additional factors when investigating the source. In our results, respondents a priori agreed with a communicator they found sympathetic, regardless the content of the message.

These conclusions lead to a reflection on the power of the source, and who is given voice. As indicated earlier, *who* communicates a message is of great importance since the audience attributes certain roles to that communicator thus will read the message within a specific framework. Some stakeholders hold more power than others do. For example,

journalists and (non-)governmental organizations have access to a larger platform than (minoritized) citizens do. The latter, specifically in the case of minorities, might be vocal but not heard. At the same time, the expectations towards these stakeholders can be different. Although media and organizations have great reach, they are expected to be neutral and their messages are viewed through this lens, in opposition to the communication of citizens. An organization could for example choose to have a personalized account respond to reactions online rather than out of the name of the organization, as it makes direct communication more personal and distracts from the connotations connected to an organization. A potential pitfall is, even more so in the case of online communication, the personal targeting of the communicating stakeholder.

When realizing one holds a powerful voice (e.g., by being perceived as an expert and sympathetic), it can be good to consider the impact of the content of the message. A more nuanced, empathic message can be preferred over a fuelling tweet. An example of such empathetic tweet could be: "I understand your concern and applaud your solidarity with others. I see it differently, as I'm concerned for our collective social welfare and our capacity to take newcomers in" compared to a fuelling tweet as: "You're a naive open-borders gut mensch. *They* will only profit from our hard work and our own elderly will be left behind."

Especially in the context of representation of minorities, the concept of power can be questioned (see the securitisation of the debate (Chapter 2 and 3) combined with a narrow perspective on issues in the public debate (Chapter 2) and the impact hereof on members of society (Chapter 5)). In the collective struggle over meaning, frames play a part (Vliegenthart & Van Zoonen, 2011), urging to factor power in when studying frames (Carragee & Roefs, 2004). While the presented framing research in this contribution places all (counter-)frames at the same level without knowledge of which stakeholders use which frame, the results give some preliminary indications on the role of power.

In the context of migration, only in 4.7% of the news articles, the concerned group is given voice (Chapter 3). Within the radicalisation framework, the participants indicate a lack of tools or power to counter harmful narratives that concern them (see Chapter 5). These results are in line with research on diversity in Flemish press, showing an underrepresentation of voices of young people, elderly people, women and ethnic-cultural minorities (Vandenberghe et al., 2015). Specific approaches are discussed in the next section.

Visuals

Pictures are often incorporated to draw attention to a message. Visual framing (Geise, 2017) highlights certain aspects of reality, influencing framing effects by their emotional and salience enhancing aspects (Powell et al., 2015). Their high salience, containing a lot of information in one visual, conflicts with less control over how the audience will interpret these visuals (Geise & Baden, 2015). The performed studies did not go in-depth on the visual framing of the addressed issues, however, there are three aspects to bear in mind when choosing visuals to accompany a message a sensitive topic related to people with a migration background: the perspective, the ethics, and the subject of the photo.

Firstly, when representing 'migration', pictures can differ in whether they show an individual or a group, are in close-up or zoomed-out. A zoomed-out picture can symbolize the distance, and especially when combined with the representation of a large group of people, trigger feelings of threat and discomfort (for more insights, see Van Gorp, 2005). Simultaneously, as said before, the *The innocent victim* perspective in the context of migration can be viewed as a polarising perspective. Choosing a picture from this perspective can evoke feelings of being misguided: where are the other newcomers?

Secondly, a trade-off between ethics and social importance needs to be made. For example, when the three-year-old Alan Kurdi drowned on the shore of Turkey (September, 2015), the picture of his body travelled the world. In Belgium, the picture of a 'transmigrant' who drowned in the North Sea (August, 2019) after using a self-made lifejacket with plastic bottles went viral. These pictures were spread to raise awareness of the circumstances refugees are facing, which is balanced to the private interest of the families and the deceased, which could lead to the decision not to spread the pictures.

Thirdly, building on the case of migration, considering what the subject of the visual will be is essential. Either people who are migrating can be the focus, or it can be preferred to opt for alternative options such as buildings (e.g., an asylum centre) or borders (e.g., a sign of 'Belgium'). In the case of the representation of people, the advantage is that the message is personalized and can create some form of recognition by for example the representation of a family. However, as mentioned in the earlier points, when migrating people are victimized or criminalized, the representation turns negative. When an alternative approach is chosen and people are not the subject of the visual, these negative points are avoided. However, simultaneously the personal perspective disappears and if this is combined with dehumanised

word use, it seems as if the issue at hand no longer involves people. Choosing what picture will be used, involves a choice for a certain perspective and a simplified representation of reality. Including visuals thus means being aware of this limitation, and balancing different considerations before deciding which approach to take. For example, Chapter 4 describes the search for 'suited' visuals on the topic of radicalisation.

Humour

In dealing with sensitive topics, humour can decrease discomfort (Johnson, 1990) and act as a coping mechanism (Lyttle, 2007) depending on the context (Bippus, 2003). In an informal context, humour can help tackling sensitive topics such as sexism or racism (Scarpetta & Spagnolli, 2009). The humour quality does not determine the de-escalation of quality rather than the speakers motives for using humour (Bippus, 2003). For example, if humour is used to improve the mood it is appreciated more compared to when the speaker lacks argumentative skills (Bippus, 2003). In some situations, humour on sensitive topics is seen as inappropriate, for example in a student-teacher relation referencing to sexual or ethnic characteristics (Poirier & Wilhelm, 2014) or in a work environment (Lyttle, 2007), as humour can relate to bullying (Klein & Kuiper, 2006).

In interpersonal communication, in a trusted environment, humour can mitigate difficult conversations. When a humorous comment is understood differently or perceived as offensive, a conversation can take place and intentions clarified. Talking about 'radicalisation' in conversations with the suspect community, the authors incorporated humour in the methodology (via *cartoon elicitation*, see Chapter 4). By the use of humorous cartoons, sensitive and potential stigmatising aspects of the framing of radicalisation were discussed (for example, a suggested link between Islam and radicalisation). In line with what Bippus (2003) addressed, in this particular situation, the humour worked as it took the tension out of the room and created an informal atmosphere. This was possible through the creation of a safe space with the participants, and openness of the researcher to questions. For example, one of the conversations took place during Ramadan, on a day on which the researcher was fasting herself. The participants asked personal questions on why the researcher decided to fast, and an open conversation on this topic helped create an informal atmosphere rather than a researcher-participant opposition. As the participants knew more about the researcher as a person, the sensitive topics touched upon later via humour were either immediately identified as humour, or open to discuss (e.g., "Is this how you see it too?"). Additionally, joint laughing about a joke worked a sort of bonding and certainly was an icebreaker when it comes to a tense situation.

In another focus group, this personal conversation was less extensive and participants held more to the background. During that conversation, certain cartoons in which Islam or the participants neighbourhood was represented, were more easily seen as offensive or got a more defensive response (e.g., "So stereotypical!") rather than starting a conversation.

In a communication context of mass-spread messages, referencing to minoritized groups humour can be perceived as insensitive. For example, jokes including Jews or Muslims might end up in a discussion on anti-Semitism or Islamophobia. In the case of media or online networks, there is less control over how an audience will receive a message. When aiming to create debate and posit an opinion, humour can be a great tool to present a simplified message that is easily spread. However, in search of connection, humour on sensitive topics can create more distance. The experiences with interpersonal conversations indicate the importance of a safe space and trust, which is less evident in mass-communication.

The Mohammed-cartoons (2005) or the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks (January 2015) show that humour is not received in the same way by everyone. Similar patterns as with the earlier describe discussion on language use (e.g., 'wit' versus 'blank') arise. On the one hand, such humour is interpreted as problematic and offensive. On the other hand, people applying this humour (and supporters) see the comments as a limitation of freedom of speech and censorship. For example, the discussion on the cartoon by *Charlie Hebdo* depicting Alan Kurdi as a sexual predator (January, 2016) was described as immoral and inhumane. At the same time, it could be said that such depictions touch upon fears present in society, uncovered through such humour. Debating them can be perceived as better than pretending that the tensions do not exist. A beneficial function of humour is to express issues that society is struggling with in a light-hearted way. Interpersonal communication can stimulate joint laughing, bringing people closer together, diminishing fears between in- and out-groups more easily than in mass-communication. Working with cartoon-elicitation, the researcher (belonging to the majority group) invites the participants to look jointly at the humoristic, enlarged stereotypes.

Depending on the communication aim, the stakeholders' decision to include humour on certain topics can differ. Aiming to connect, in an initial contact (be it online, or real life, or campaign), stakeholders can choose to refrain from potentially offensive humour. When the aim is to stir debate on a certain topic, humour can contribute to this aim.

6.5 Applying research to practice

In the above section, a detailed description of advantages and disadvantages combined with explicit examples shed light on added insights based on conducted research. In what follows, specific approaches will be described for each stakeholder. A pressure group, such as a political party or an NGO, will make more use of fight strategies to create awareness in contrast to policy members and news media who will rely more on fuse strategies to inform large crowds. Academia forms another important and powerful actor in public debate, whose role can variate according to the academics purpose.

6.5.1 Pressure group

Pressure groups, such as NGOs or political parties, aim to create awareness for an issue. One of their communication goals might be to clarify the position of the organization, and stimulate debate on the topic, which they can do through a combination of awareness campaigns and coalition building. For the creation of campaigns, strategies can rely on framing theory, because simplified, connecting stories need a coherent logic of causes, consequences, responsible actors and potential solutions (Benford & Snow, 2000). Resonating frames can inspire social movements (Johnston & Noakes, 2005) via three key characteristics (Snow, 2013). They focus attention on what is important, they tell a coherent story and they can transform the interpretation of an issue. Mobilization then occurs due to a collective interpretation process of social issues (Snow, 2013).

Creating awareness campaigns

In 2018, the non-governmental organization 11.11.11 launched a campaign on migration with a potential polarising message (see Figure 9). The poster translates to: “140.000 vacancies go unfilled according to VBO. Salvation is on its way. Migration works if we make it work.”. In an online experiment (Van Gorp, Figoureux, & Vyncke, 2018), the campaign was evaluated. The campaign reached one fifth of the respondents, and 23% (strongly) agreed with the campaign, while 32% was undecided and nearly 45% (strongly) disagreed. The campaign spurred debate, not only on- and offline but also in the comment section of the experiment (e.g., “What a weird campaign. People need to be rescued first; they have been through a lot”). However, when the aim is to have a constructive debate on an issue looking for potential solutions, a more nuanced strategy deriving from the ‘fuse’ category is advised. Examples are a personalized approach in which testimonies of refugees are presented, or an interactive campaign where citizens with and without migration backgrounds can meet and discuss in a

respectful manner. Additionally, people can be presented in different roles outside of the role as ‘migrant’ to shed light on the multiple identities people carry.

Figure 9 Campaign by NGO 11.11.11 that won De Standaard Solidarity Prize.



Before launch, it could be assumed that the depicted campaign by 11.11.11 would create opposition. Being prepared by having a contextualized press release, making a statement, or giving an interview (e.g., ‘We phrase it sharply, but we acknowledge that open borders are not optional. We just want to engage the debate’) ready at the same time, attention is created for the issue, while simultaneously calling upon a constructive debate.

6.5.2 (Minoritized) citizens

Citizens find themselves in a different position than the other stakeholders. On the one hand, they can stand for their personal opinion without having connotations attached to their name. However, minoritized citizens challenge this based on experiences of prejudice. On the other hand, they might lack the tools and power to communicate to a large audience on issues that are close to their heart. The following section describes a few examples of how (minoritized) citizens can engage in polarised debates.

Creating a personal narrative

As addressed by Leurs et al. (2018), when confronted with stereotypical representations, an option for minoritized citizens is to create their own story, for which social media can be an

outlet with little hurdles. This strategy not only applies to minoritized citizens, but also offers opportunity to individuals that seek to go beyond mainstream framing. Often, dominant framing language, such as word use from the *Taking back control*, *The innocent victim* and *The hostile intruder* frames (see Chapter 2) dripple into everyday word use. However, when integrating terminology that one wants to oppose, the image is strengthened. A good exercise for citizens aiming to communicate outside dominant narratives is to perform a form of self-assessment (for examples, see Van Gorp, Van Hove, Figoureux & Vyncke, 2020; Van Gorp, Figoureux, & Vandekeybus, 2018).

Such a self-assessment may consist of a reflection on personal position taking, and what arguments and visuals are important to the individual. An added value can be in challenging oneself in drawing the issue: How do I see the topic visualized? What aspects do I spontaneously highlight? Are there things that I want to add to this picture, and why? When it comes to terminology, a brainstorm with peers can be a creative process of finding new terminology. Ideally, words are not too long (see reflections on 'language', p. 18). Examples of alternative terminology for counter-frames are "country of opportunity", "bundled forces" or "talent has no colour" (Van Gorp, Figoureux, & Vandekeybus, 2018). Social media can provide a helpful platform as it has less hurdles for minoritized citizens to claim their voice, compared to formal platforms such as television-debates or newspaper interviews. It has proven helpful in raising awareness in cases as police violence or #metoo.

The creation of awareness by citizens has received strong counter reactions by citizens that feel threatened in their identity. The attitude of calling out racism, sexism, homophobia or transphobia has been labelled 'woke' which quickly became a synonym for 'annoying' (see Verstraete, 2021) as the discussion rose on children's literature receiving racism-warnings (e.g., *Pippi Langkous*: Staes, 2021), an Antwerp tradition of 'Antwerpse handje' referring to colonial torture (ATV, 2021) or a stereotypical joke towards Asian people in a popular soap (DVS, 2021). These debates can potentially fuel societal polarisation, as there are now references to a so-called woke-generation who are said to be striving for a 'cancel-culture' which is opposed to members of society who do not see issues with certain linguistics or traditions. Without reference to these cases, the comment that traditions 'suddenly become racist' goes beyond the fact that certain traditions might have always been racist, only now they are being called out for it, which can be uncomfortable. Racism is not always explicitly present, but can be very subtle and related to a 'Zeitgeist'. For example, the Zwarte Piet [Black Pete] case, causes much debate and often misunderstanding. The overwhelming majority of people

who play Zwarte Piet today do not have a racist intent nor see it that way. Much of the resistance towards the demand for change is based on this difference of perception. A process of conversation, listening with mutual respect can lead to a compromise as in Belgium: the creation of Roetpiet [Sooty Pete]. However, concerns are voiced that a focus on smaller issues takes away attention of systemic problems. The friction that exists on these battles (e.g., Zwarte Piet) could reduce support from larger society for structural changes on exclusion mechanisms such as discrimination on the housing market (Stad Leuven, 2021) or in the workplace (UNIA, 2019). The attention from such fundamental issues might be derived by a focus on 'the hype of the day', which might diminish societal support for legitimate demands. Yet, social change implies counter reaction and friction.

Social media are a commonly used tool to voice concerns and often stir debate on topics such as Zwarte Piet. As presented earlier, social media are advised as a tool with little hurdles for citizens to use for propagating their narrative. Although these media have their advantages, some hurdles need to be considered. Fuelling from the spiral of silence theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1993) to a fear of isolation of on the one hand the own community, and on the other hand perhaps the fear of creating greater distance to society. Additionally, presenting an argument on social media can result in targeted hate messages, even more so when it concerns women and people with a migration background (Matamoros-Fernández, 2020; Trindade, 2020), with focus on religion or background and not content. Thus, in the context of minoritized and marginalised groups, it might be too easy to 'just use social media to speak up'. Moreover, alternative options of being vocal, such as trough cooperation with news media or academia, are often met with distrust. Basing on the conversations with young members of the 'suspect community' (see Chapter 5), earlier experiences with outsiders (e.g., news media and academia) have resulted in negative representations, or a story being told that was not theirs. In these practices, the participants might feel used to support a narrative that was presupposed but not theirs. For example, during one of the described research projects, a youth worker shared the story of high school students in Molenbeek approached by international news media. It was said that the journalist entered the class, and the students joined in a narrative of "dangerous streets" and "invisible radicalisation". Only the journalist supposedly had no clue she was being fooled, and published a sensational story. As they are an overrepresented silenced minority (see Chapter 5), this anecdote illustrates the awareness of prevailing narratives on them and their neighbourhood. The combination of these factors and experiences can result in remaining silent.

As these voices offer a valuable counter narrative, and the silencing or misrepresentation might lead to feelings of alienation, many search for ways to overcome this challenge. Several local initiatives work on supporting young people by offering a safety net, for example, Bx Brussels combining football with homework guidance, health, guidance to work and more, or BBA box club in Brussels. Government has also focused on creating greater participation (HIVA, 2021). These are great examples of safe spaces where young people are reassured that their voice and opinion matters, a basic need when aiming to counter narratives. Such safety net can counter a fear of isolation. Moreover, the structure of such organizations can be a great tool for coalition building. There are journalists and academics actively searching for ways to support in giving voice, but often encounter a rigid wall. Similar experiences happened in the context of the research on radicalisation, however, when aiming to include voices of migrants and refugees, comparable concerns on a confrontation with institutions might appear. Youth workers often work as a gatekeeper in these circumstances, protecting young people from an overload of research and media. Academics and journalists need to be aware of the potential consequences for the participants, and not see participation as self-evident. Investing time and building a trust-relationship can construct a long-term valuable relation, and in essence learning how these voices can be heard rather than simply voiced. Possibilities in academia are methods of co-creation, where participants become co-researchers or member checking, offering participants the opportunity to comment on analysis.

Young people that are vocal and willing to speak up in cooperation with media and/or academia should have the agency to do so. An important aspect here is probably the feeling of unity and coalition building. Media trainings for young people in associations could strengthen the capabilities but even more the confidence in these encounters, where a power relation is present. For the young people, such training could for example learn more about the delivery of the message. Not only the content matters, but also how you say it, so insights in the posture, use of voice, gestures, might help. Additionally, a proactive attitude instead of a responsive one gives the young people agency over the narrative. For example, with the launch of a local initiative, the local press can be invited. Multiple initiatives exist for young people to raise concerns, such as youth councils or initiatives for policy participation such as ‘De Wakkere Burger’, an initiative to stimulate ‘active citizenship’ through citizen participation in policy (dewakkereburger.be). Some of these initiatives specifically aim to include minoritized groups, such as ‘Roots’ in Leuven focusing on adolescent refugees (mijnleuven.be/rootsleuven), or ‘Diversity in Action’ in Sint-Niklaas, raising minority voices. Moreover, approaches such as

urban arts can inspire young people to be creative in their narrative. This can be expressed through for example graffiti, slam poetry or music. Local initiatives have stimulated this, for example the 'Trill' trajectory in Leuven working with language and young people (trill.be) based on the following inspiration: "For the voices screaming to be heard, silenced by society. For the abundance of untapped potential."

Keeping silent

In some circumstances, someone can decide to ignore a polarised issue, or take a detour to another topic. When the issue is brought up at work, for example, it can be preferred not to continue with the potential polarising conversation to retain a collegial working atmosphere or keep private and working environments separated. Avoidance strategies can be applied when the issue of migration is brought up, and someone desires not to discuss this, as they do not know where it will lead or they are tired of such debates. The participants of the conversations (see Chapter 5) implied to apply this strategy with their peers, not to start discussions on sensitive topics. This can happen by diverting the conversation to a different topic ("This reminds me of this TV show, have you seen it?"). The use of these avoidance strategies is not recommended as it does not address the underlying polarisation in society, considering nuanced opinions take up space of polarised viewpoints. However, it is understandable that people, especially with a migration background, grow tired of accounting themselves towards people they sometimes barely know.

6.5.3 News media and policy

As a last subcategory, some examples of news media and policy will be examined. Policy is understood here as actors that create policy, thus for example governmental organizations and their political actors. In certain cases, policy makers will rather act as a pressure group to raise attention for an issue or attract voters to their political party. In that case, their role changes and they are more likely to apply strategies as discussed under 'Pressure group'. They are grouped together as their main communication goal is to inform large audiences and they thus rely mostly on collective fuse strategies.

Playing with frames and counter-frames

A deductive analysis of the use of frames on migration in Flemish media (see Chapter 2) revealed a narrow view on the issue. Only three (counter-)frames – *Taking back control, Innocent Victim* and *Hostile Intruder* – appear regularly and in the majority of the news articles only one (problematizing) perspective is presented. Alternative perspectives are nearly absent.

When the aim is to inform, it is advised to present a wide variety of (counter-)frames based on which the audience can form their own opinion. Additionally, complex realities are not represented through limited frames. This can be done by, in a news article, combining multiple perspectives. For example, when discussing migration, a problem can be introduced with a frame (e.g., "migration is a problem, because it is a large cost for society") and added with a counter-frame (e.g., "migration can help counter the ageing population"). The different reports (Van Gorp et al., 2020; Van Gorp, Figoureux, & Vandekeybus, 2018) provide several guidelines to structure communication. Alternatively, by literally bringing in different voices (thus interviewing/quoting multiple people), different perspectives are brought in. This raises the discussion: Should every perspective be given a platform? The freedom of opinion protects citizens to formulate their opinion within the limits of the law – it does not give the right to a platform. It could be decided to incorporate voices of, for example, conspiracy thinkers or people on the extreme ends of the political spectrum also as means to challenge these ideas. Remaining within the frameworks of the law, a debate on policy and social issues should be held as broadly as possible. Additionally, results (see Chapter 2) indicated a limited presence of direct representation of the discussed population group. Aiming to give voice to the directly involved is linked to both (imagined) contact theory as well as bringing nuance in the debate.

6.6 Discussion

The described communication advice on polarised topics has built upon literature proposing fight, flee or fuse strategies. The presented research has mainly added insights in the fuse-category, further exploring the role of nuance and empathy. Mainly, the applied approach of counter-framing can enhance perspective-taking, increase awareness of personal bias and create a framework for a more nuanced message by weighing ratio versus emotion and using a variety of frames. Additionally, the factor of message packaging is taken into account. In this sub-category, the significance of language use, picture choice, application of humour and the source is brought to the foreground. All four play their part in how a message can be (de)polarising by changing the tone or lessening discomfort.

Previous observations on flee-strategies, e.g., self-censorship or topic avoidance, appear to be supported by the results of the completed studies. A preference for a certain perspective (in this case, *The innocent Victim*) and at the same time a caution to publicly share this opinion might be grounded in flee-strategies. Continued research on this can provide more detailed insights.

This chapter aimed to present reflections on the different aspects to take into account when communicating on polarising topics. By use of concrete examples, strategies were balanced. As the overview shows, there is no black-and-white answer to most answers – do I use humour in my communication? If yes, how? What picture do I present? The presented work intends to guide readers by balancing pros and cons and make the audience make their own decision as for each situation and each stakeholder, the communication goals will be different.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

The previous chapters shed light on the framing dynamics of migration and radicalisation in Belgium, moving beyond a limiting and polarising dichotomy often adhered to in literature. Moreover, the studies provided insights in the framing in line with key events and the migration-terrorism nexus, while bringing in the experiences of the so-called suspect community with these framings. As such, the dissertation has added to the literature of framing migration and radicalisation, and of the experiences of minoritized groups with dominant perspectives. A dominant feeling of 'Stranger Danger', namely the moral panic that someone unknown might pose a threat, has been critically examined from multiple perspectives. This has enriched the understanding of how othering affects the out-group. By introducing cartoon elicitation, an innovative methodological approach, the research has advanced the search for suitable methodologies in researching sensitive topics. A final contribution lies in a practical overview of potential strategies to respond to polarising issues, added with a hands-on guide on communicating on depolarising topics.

The first part of this concluding chapter will briefly summarize the key findings of the five previous chapters in responding to the four research questions, where Chapter 2 and 3 combined respond to the first research question, Chapter 5 to the second, Chapter 4 to the third and Chapter 6 to the final research question. The second section not only presents reflections of these findings with regard to literature on othering, framing, but also on lessons learned on methodology and academic responsibility. The limitations of this dissertation are addressed followed by an outlook to potential future research.

7.1 Summary of key findings

7.1.1 Content

A polarising and limiting dichotomy spurred the quest for generic over issue-specific frames, based on shared cultural values with a detailed explanation of the supporting reasoning behind each (counter-)frame, which could be categorised as 'culturally embedded frames' (Van Gorp,

2010). Chapters 2 and 3 offer elaborate overviews of the (counter-)framing of migration and radicalisation, responding to the first research question:

RQ1: How can the framing on migration and radicalisation go beyond a polarising dichotomy in relation to key events?

Both chapters clarify the extensive potential of interpreting migration and radicalisation, as respectively eight and twelve (counter-)frames were reconstructed. In the context of radicalisation, more deproblematizing perspectives than problematizing arose. However, problematizing does not mean problematic, as well as deproblematizing does not mean unproblematic. Deproblematizing counter-frames can present a stigmatising representation (e.g., a victim perspective) or deproblematize an issue too much (e.g., the *Puberty* perspective in radicalisation research). Moreover, presented alternatives might have problematic connotations, for example the *Win-win* perspective building upon a superiority attitude. Thus, both framing analyses present a more complex overview of potential (counter-)frames on radicalisation and migration, going beyond a positive versus negative opposition.

The concept of radicalisation might lose its explanatory value as it is potentially interpreted in no less than twelve different ways. The migration concept also carries multiple perspectives. Nonetheless, there seems to be common ground on what migration is: people moving from one place to another. The perspectives differ on the causes, solutions, and values connected to it as opposed to radicalisation, where the core definition of the word alters substantially. Some of the offered counter-frames even refute to use the term 'radicalisation' as the people who reason from this viewpoint consider the term to describe a normal process (e.g. *Meaningfulness*). Radicalisation is a clear example of a social construct, as the interaction between frames and reality is all the more important in the context of such floating signifier. As addressed by Schultz and colleagues (2020), the ambiguity of the term leads actors to rely on frames to construct their image of what radicalisation is and how to interact with so-called radicalised individuals. There is thus an essence of self-fulfilling prophecy: if radicalisation is defined and framed from a security perspective, this symbolic reality will come to predominate reality and define, among other things, policy actions.

Although a multitude of perspectives was identified, the Flemish public debate proved to be limited by relying on three dominant (counter-)frames: *Taking back control, The innocent victim* and *The hostile intruder* with the presentation of mostly only one frame in a newspaper article (see Chapter 2). This frame use is not vast, but changes over time, which is in line with

results of earlier research (Beckers & Van Aelst, 2019; Shih et al., 2008; Sulaiman-Hill et al., 2011). Looking at the migration-terrorism nexus (Galantino, 2020), key events such as the *Charlie Hebdo* attack (2015) or the mediatisation of the death of Alan Kurdi (2015) correlate with an alternation in frame use. Respectively there is a rise in the use of *The hostile intruder* and *Taking back control,* and with the latter a decline in the use of *The innocent victim* and a rise of *Taking back control.* The use of perspectives is not a stern given but rather dynamic, in interaction with society.

7.1.2 Perception

The second research question focuses on the perception of the mapped frames and counter-frames:

RQ2: How do members of the suspect community experience dominant perspectives?

Chapter 5 presents an extensive analysis of the interaction of members of the suspect community with dominant perspectives. The analysis focused on two main elements: (1) 'us versus them' dynamics and (2) potential divergence between reality and dominant framing. Summarizing these results, the participants indicated a *dual distancing mechanism*, where they distance themselves from a dominant, stigmatising discourse, as well as from perceived radicalised individuals. They did so by focusing on a form of violent radicalisation, and condemning violence at all costs, while also refuting arguments that link radicalisation to religion or toxic neighbourhoods. Additionally, the participants problematized the radicalisation discourse while simultaneously interpreting the concept within dominant narratives. On the one hand, dominant discourse was objected to because of stigmatising elements and harmful consequences. On the other hand, radicalisation was spontaneously interpreted as 'Muslim-radicalisation' and as a form of violence, elements that are part of dominant views. The participants individualise the framing of radicalisation by not linking it with a social or geographical context, but by focusing on wrong religious interpretations or an erring individual. It seems that a contextual interpretation equals a criminalization of that context – thus, the concerned communities – which the interviewees oppose.

Additionally, language use indicated potential internalisation of stigmatising discourses, although these were rejected formally. The ambiguity of the concept radicalisation, and how it is rather unknown, enlarges the effects of dominant language use and framing. As there is a limited vocabulary available to talk about radicalisation, dominant jargon (e.g., referring to the concept as a disease) is used also by adversaries of such perspectives. A broader

spectrum of perspectives, and thus alternative terminology, expands the possibilities. Lastly, a strong reliance on community might be a response to a constant targeting in the public sphere. A negative representation and public questioning of belonging can lead to a strong reliance on a close community.

7.1.3 Methodology

Chapter 4 extensively described the search for a suitable methodology building on photo elicitation, in response to the third research question:

RQ3: How can the method of photo elicitation be enhanced to better facilitate research on sensitive topics?

The research continued upon the tradition of photo elicitation as the method has been found to facilitate research with less powerful groups (Rose, 2016), triggering new information, emotions, memories and overall more personal conversations while loosening the power dynamics (Allen, 2011; Bagnoli, 2009; Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Kunimoto, 2004; Matteucci, 2013; Warner et al., 2016). However, the combination of discussing a sensitive topic and the aim of introducing the different perspectives on radicalisation in the planned research, lead to some extra challenges and thus the development of a suitable methodology. Photos present a specific event or person, which can distract a conversation from a general issue, while introducing humour provokes more personal beliefs on sensitive topics (MacGillivray, 2005; Moloney et al., 2013). The choice for cartoons comes from the ability to incorporate stereotypes that facilitate conversations on intolerances, the capturing of the participant's attention and the fact that a cartoon is explicitly fictional (MacGillivray, 2005; Nathan, 1992; Warburton & Saunders, 1996). By creating researcher-driven cartoons, the researchers could safeguard the discussion of *all* perspectives on radicalisation.

The cartoon elicitation method, used in a combination of interviews and focus groups, made way for the discussion of potentially stigmatising aspects using humour, as the responses to the *Penance* or *Virus*-frame (see Appendix C) indicated. Moreover, through the cartoons, the answers of the participants were more elaborate and focused on personal life stories. The use of cartoons, which provided a form of riddle by trying to decode the message, kept the attention of the participants with the conversation. However, the amount of cartoons used still challenged the attention span of the participants and could be adjusted in future research. Pre-testing the cartoons to discover blind spots of the researcher due to personal bias, and avoid potential harm deemed essential.

7.1.4 Applicability

In search of practical tools to facilitate responses to polarising issues, Chapter 6 provided an answer to the fourth and final research question:

RQ4: How can the performed research contribute to practical knowledge on depolarising communication on antithetical issues?

In this chapter, the different communication strategies with regards to polarisation have been categorised in fight, flee and fuse strategies (for an overview, see Figure 8), responses that aim to depolarise (e.g., Kahan et al., 2015), ignore (e.g., Matthes et al., 2018) or fuel (e.g., McCaffrey & Keys, 2000) a debate. The existing literature has been added with insights from Chapters 2—5, and additional studies (Van Gorp, Van Hove, Figoureux & Vyncke, 2020; Van Gorp, Figoureux, & Vandekeybus, 2018; Van Gorp, Figoureux, & Vyncke, 2018). As discussed in this sixth chapter, all strategies can be applied by different stakeholders depending on the communication goal. An elaborate practical guide takes the reader through a variety of situations in which pros and cons of the distinct strategies are balanced. This chapter adds to the literature on response strategies to polarising issues by presenting a new categorisation of existing literature, and supplementing it with reflections based upon the performed research over the years. As such, the message packaging is elaborately analysed and part of a larger application of theory to practice.

7.2 Reflections

7.2.1 Othering

As discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, the creation of an out-group through othering reaffirms the identity of the self (Brons, 2015; Chimakonam, 2020; van Houtum, 2021). This dissertation continues the reflection on *othering* by looking at the intertwinement of frames with for example, racism, by exploring the concept of gratitude and mainly by deepening the insights in the creation of an out-group and how that relates both to the out-group and in-group.

Frame-intertwinement and othering

The framing of migration and radicalisation does not operate within a vacuum but exists in interaction with the framing of related events or topics (for an elaborate explanation of frame-building, see Boesman et al., 2017). Looking at the framing of migration, *The hostile intruder*

is based on a racial and Islamophobic perspective determining who is welcome in the country and who is not. Additionally, *The clash of civilisations* frame links to the framing of Muslims, which has shown to be a dominantly negative and stereotypical representation (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017). Representations of Islam and Muslims have been shown to exist within a polarised framework (Akbarzadeh & Smith, 2005; Melhem & Punyanunt-Carter, 2019; Scanlan, 2010). As such, these frames are shaping a distinction between an 'us' (civilized, educated, norms and values) and a 'them' (barbaric, violent, inferior). *Taking back the money* adds to this image by including a definition of profiteers and money-grubbing strangers. The self is then the only one entitled to the hard-earned welfare. However, not only the frames contribute to the construction of identities, so do counter-frames. The *The innocent victim* counter-frame is a prime example of a deproblematizing concept that contributes to a negative image of an out-group, and constructs a positive self-image. Within this counter-frame, migrants and refugees are helpless creatures that need saving. Thus, the self is presented as the selfless saviour of innocent victims. In contrast, *Win-win* does not present the self as an empathetic compassionate, but rather as a superior employer. By handing out jobs that are deemed inferior to the in-group, both groups are 'helped': the self is presented as generous, and the out-group as offered opportunity. The other frames in the overview on migration focus on systemic aspects rather than on individual and have a less clear contribution to the creation of self and other. However, in the case of *Taking back control,* the main argument is a condemnation of current chaos in migration-management, a systemic aspect, but in the linguistic choices, dehumanization can take place (e.g., through watering metaphors).

When analysing the frame matrix of radicalisation through a lens of othering and frame intertwinement, the frames deem to be linked to the framing of terrorism, migration, Islam and multiculturalism (Lynch, 2013). As indicated by Silva (2017), the radicalisation discourse reflects othering through the description of Muslims as alien to the West. This intertwinement of frames is linked to the hyper security of policies on radicalisation (Awan et al., 2011; Bramadat & Dawson, 2014). As with the framing of migration, a *Clash of civilisations* frame was reconstructed, playing into the 'us versus them' polarisation. The *Virus* frame puts blame on a toxic religion, making the out-group into potential contaminators. Looking at the counter-frames, *Meaningfulness* also brings religion to the foreground, shining light on the struggle of current society to deal with religious individuals and arguing for a universal need for spirituality. As such, this counter-frame goes beyond an opposition of secular versus religious. The Victim-Intruder dichotomy continues in-group/out-group dynamics, however these are not

the only frames that do so. Awareness on the implicit assumptions of frames and using them in thought-trough combinations (discussed in Chapter 6) can help overcome these processes.

The migration debate is characterized by a securitised discourse (Kaya, 2009), with a dominance of the frames *Taking back control* and *The hostile intruder.* The *Virus* frame in the radicalisation discourse points to a similar securitisation: the need for a contained and targeted, repressive response. Earlier research has pointed to the securitisation of these debates (Fadil et al., 2019; Kaya, 2009). The spontaneous response from an in-group towards the unknown appears to be a securitisation and feeling of threat, or in other words: stranger danger.

Gratitude

Connected to the creation of self, and other, is the concept of gratitude. It is both present in the debates on migration and radicalisation, where 'the other' is expected to be grateful for whatever is given by the in-group. Acceptance by the in-group depends on this gratitude, for example in the *The innocent victim* perspective in the context of migration. The help offered is seen as a heroic act by the in-group, and thus the out-group receiving the help could *at least* be grateful. Similarly, *Win-win* implies for migrants and refugees always to be productive and mediocrity is not an option. In the context of radicalisation, the *Mutiny* frame constructs an idea of radicalisation as a revolt – in contrast to respect and obedience to authority, and a form of gratitude towards larger society. Gratitude connects to the categorisation of deserving and undeserving migrants (Dhaliwal & Forkert, 2015; Mügge & van der Haar, 2016), distinguishing between good and bad minorities, who is seen as valuable and who is not.

These expectations from in-group towards out-group are not solely related to the debate on migration and radicalisation, but can for example be recognized in conversations on poverty as well. People living in social housing who complain about living circumstances (e.g., unsafe buildings) are seen as ungrateful, or not allowed to speak up for their rights because they are already receiving such benefits. This seems to suggest that human rights are not universal, but rather preserved for what is seen as a successful in-group.

The power of shaping 'the other'

As put by Jensen (2011), there lies power in the shaping of the out-group, to which the other can respond by (re)constructing their identity. In the dissertation, this insight is presented in two ways in the migration and radicalisation debate.

Firstly, in the context of migration power is present in determining who is deserving and undeserving of being welcomed in a host country. Migrants have been perceived through

this lens for years (Dhaliwal & Forkert, 2015), and as consequence have to step into this categorisation outside of their power. This classification is reflected in the labelling of migrants in 'refugees' and 'economic migrants' (Rea et al., 2019), the first wanted and the second unwanted (Mügge & van der Haar, 2016). In defining their identity in confrontation with this dynamic (Jensen, 2011), in a context of applying for asylum or integration in a new country, little opportunity is there to step out of a dominant framework.

Secondly, the securitisation discourse originating from a powerful in-group towards a less powerful out-group has led to the creation of a suspect community in the radicalisation debate (Breen-Smyth, 2014), added with (de)radicalisation policies focusing on Muslim communities (Awan, 2012; Claes et al., 2020; Qurashi, 2018). Through 'us versus them' discourses, and 'us' and 'them' is created. The so-called out-group actually never was an out-group, but rather part of the 'us', as they are Belgian citizens, members of the same society. 'They' are 'us'. The persistence of these narratives affects thoughts and actions, resulting in a constructed us and them. As discussed in Chapter 5, these dynamics continue within communities, and might affect identity building of members of what is perceived the out-group. Based upon feelings of fear and discomfort, stigmatising narratives arise with little possibility to counteract. Chapter 6 elaborates on communication strategies to respond to polarising issues such as migration or radicalisation, in which case fight, flee or fuse approaches could provide support.

Overall, a recurring phenomenon in the perception of an out-group from an in-group is the categorisation of minoritized groups in good and bad minorities (Mügge & van der Haar, 2016; Omelicheva, 2011). The popular phrasing "you're one of the good ones" contributes to this perception. Potentially used with good intentions, the remark implies that the person spoken to (a) belongs to a different group than the speaker, and (b) that that group is overall negatively perceived. Thus, it distances the person equally from the speaker, as well as from the out-group.

Constructing the Other, and the Self

Research on othering indicated that the process not only leads to a construction of an out-group, but plays an important role in the construction of the in-group (Brons, 2015). Thus, the othering dynamics in the communication on migration and radicalisation should be read in a context of defining the self, maintaining order and unity (van Houtum, 2021; van Houtum & Van Naerssen, 2002). It is thus a way of saying: "They do not belong to us, we are not like them."

At the same time, a dehumanization of the other results in a dehumanization of the self (Bogaert, 2021). For example, the treatment of people in Camp Moria and the thousands lives lost in the Mediterranean Sea are incompatible with the declared European values, undermining the self-image.

Another way in which the shaping of an outsiders image conflicts with the self-image is presented in the handling of extreme-right radicalisation. When it comes to so-called Muslim-radicalisation, the word terrorist is used easily, and public opinion expects the 'Muslim-community' – perceived as one homogeneous mass – to publicly distance from these people. In the casus of extreme-right radicalisation, for example the case of trained military Jürgen Conings who declared to want to attack among other things, a mosque, and is on the run with military weapons, there is no general call for distancing as the in-group easier accepts the heterogeneity of their community. It is thus understood that most people will not associate themselves with extremists, whereas, when it comes to a constructed out-group, this heterogeneity is obscured. Simultaneously, there is a stronger feeling of 'he is one of us', as online and offline support for Jürgen continued to grow. Translating this to a context of so-called Muslim-radicalisation, the sheer insinuation of 'dancing Muslims' following terrorist attacks sparked public outrage.

Throughout the conversations as described in Chapter 5, daily subtle othering as addressed in literature (Dunn et al., 2005; Haldrup et al., 2016; Loadenthal, 2019) was touched upon. Devadoss (2020) highlights the potential consequences for physical, emotional and psychological health of the receivers of such microagressions. Moreover, as addressed by Chimakonam (2020), the out-group can redefine their identity in reaction to this process. Looking at the dynamics within the suspect community focused on in this dissertation, it could be said that internal processes of othering appear. The internal distancing, explicitly dissociating oneself from other individuals that are perceived as a liability for the group, could be the formation of other in-/out-groups. Abbas (2019a) indicated internal divisions due to an internalisation of a 'suspect identity'. Research focusing on the identity building in response to othering (Cohen & Kassan, 2018; Essers & Tedmanson, 2014; Literat, 2017) identify an interaction with this othering and a play with the presentation of ethnicity. Dual distancing can be an additional response to othering, adding to this literature.

7.2.2 Framing

Interaction with dominant framing

Looking at the basic assumption of cultivation theory, namely that through repeated mass-spread messages, perceptions of the audience are constructed (Potter, 2014), incorporating the content of those messages (Melhem & Punyanunt-Carter, 2019), this dissertation also looks at the social construction of reality, how through interaction with media messages a reality is created (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). The analysis of internalisation of dominant framing, as well as a process of dual distancing indicates a compelling interaction with dominant discourse, a creation of meaning through media (Gamson et al., 1992).

The results of this dissertation research on the interaction with dominant framing line up with previous research. Looking at a qualitative study by d'Haenens, Beentjes and Bink (2000), twenty years later the results are still valid and recognizable. For example, the following citation is almost a literal repetition of the conversations discussed in Chapter 5:

> If people do something wrong, they can, in my opinion, report it in the newspaper. But the way they do it, i.e. in huge letters saying Moroccan, Turk, etc. is quite a different story. Then someone picks up a newspaper and reads 'Turk kills boy.' If it was an ordinary Dutch boy, the headline would read 'boy kills boy.' (Group discussion, Surinamers, 15-20) (d'Haenens et al., 2000, p. 337)

As discussed earlier, these feelings of misrepresentation are not a matter of perception but have been cited in academic research (Akbarzadeh & Smith, 2005; Melhem & Punyanunt-Carter, 2019; Rane et al., 2014). Continued misrepresentation and labelling might lead to feelings of exclusion, impacting identity-building (Cohen & Kassan, 2018; Essers & Tedmanson, 2014). The question, however, is how it is possible for twenty years of research to uncover similar feelings of misrepresentation. It might also be the question if the focus thus should not only be on the targeted communities and their experiences with these representations, but on the systemic hurdles hindering an inclusive space.

Relevance of framing theory

Responding to framing critique

Framing research became popular in the early 2000s (Scheufele & Iyengar, 2015), mainly focusing on how stakeholders *frame* certain issues (D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010). The framing concept has been subject of debate and critique over the years, naming it 'one of three concepts to retire' (Krippendorff, 2017). Scheufele and Iyengar (2015) advise to redirect framing research from a focus on emphasis frames – varying perspectives (e.g., a *Victim* versus *Intruder*

perspective) – to equivalence frames – where the information presented is informationally equivalent, but the presentation is different (e.g., 'winning' versus 'losing'). They argue that the first type of framing research only adds to a vagueness of the concept, as the effects attributed to emphasis frames are not necessarily due to differences in presentation, but other changed factors. According to Scheufele and Iyengar, equivalence frames are better equipped to observe effects, as words can be interpreted differently by different people. However, D'Angelo et al. (2019) counter these comments by emphasizing that a fractured framing research should be considered a strength. Moreover, they argue that equivalence frames rarely appear in stakeholders' communication, whereas emphasis frames do. In the same contribution, attention is pointed towards the importance of language use in framing research, an essential point of focus in the presented dissertation.

Emphasis framing has been the building block of this dissertation. The critiques upon the framing concept are relevant, and taken into account in two ways. First, by focusing on emphasis framing, this research offers the opportunity to have insight in the supporting reasoning behind each frame. Instead of limiting the reconstruction of frames to a vague description, all framing analysis result in extensive frame matrices with detailed descriptions of causes, consequences, definitions and solutions offered. There is thus an academic and a societal relevance to this approach of framing. Academically, the frame matrices offer the opportunity to find explanations for individual reasoning. Going further on the assumption that framing relates to how the audience interprets and interacts with media messages, knowledge on thinking processes are an essential step in understanding this interaction. On a societal level, understanding of thinking processes can help in overcoming affective polarisation. It provides opportunities to go beyond a message and know more about underlying concerns and worries. Second, a lot of attention is put toward the validation of the reconstructed frames. Framing analyses are critiqued to be dependent on the subjectivity of the researcher, creating alternate results depending on who is performing the analysis (e.g., Matthes & Kohring, 2008). Subjectivity is a part of the framing process, as meaning is shaped through the interaction of previous knowledge of the audience and the presented frame (Van Gorp, 2010). In framing research, overcoming researchers bias is a difficult task (Van Gorp, 2005). As a basic assumption in this dissertation, no one is indeed neutral and awareness in a researcher's position is essential. In order to neutralize this researcher bias and strive for a general applicable frame overview, several steps of validation were taken into account (see Van Gorp, 2010). In the inductive analysis phase, internal and external validation took place. Internal validation was

based upon the criterion of being exhaustive and the criterion of mutual exclusivity. All excerpts should thus be able to be placed within one of the reconstructed frames. External validation was achieved through both expert interviews and workshops. Participants were experts in framing, journalists working on the theme or experts in practice, for example people with a flight story or youth workers. The expert interviews were one-on-one conversations in which all (counter-)frames were discussed one by one based on a textual representation of the frames. The workshops took the form of focus groups in which all (counter-)frames were elaborately debated. Both interviews and workshops were aimed at discussing the credibility of the frames, and whether they were perceived as recognizable and usable. In line with Matthes and Kohring (2008), for the deductive analysis, a codebook was drawn that built upon several frame elements rather than very broadly defined generic and holistic frames, such as 'conflict framing' or 'positive vs. negative' framing. This was added with a double coding of a subsample of 10% of the full sample to account for intercoder reliability.

A second critique is situated in the framing effects studies, which Scheufele and Iyengar (2015) define as effects related to the audiences cognitive schemas. In contrast, other scholars (McCombs, 2005; McCombs et al., 1997) see framing as an addition to agenda setting, describing it as 'second-level agenda-setting' to refer to effects of frames on audience perception. An important factor in framing research is that it should not be seen as a form of persuasion, but as a way in which people give meaning to reality (Scheufele & Iyengar, 2015) as stressed in this dissertation. It is through this interaction with frames that audiences construct a social reality and thus their perception of that reality that is both influenced by a representation of reality and influences that reality.

The explanatory value of framing

Framing has been labelled a concept, a theory, an approach and many other things (D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010). There is debate on whether framing serves as a supporting factor in established theories, or whether it has explanatory value on its own. This dissertation contributes to the explanatory value of framing in three ways: by focusing on counter-framing, by enhancing research on floating signifiers and by clarifying the social construction of reality.

Framing research has been said to be ambiguous and a melting pot of different approaches (Scheufele & Iyengar, 2015). Indeed, framing research has known personal interpretations, with an important categorisation between issue-specific, tied to a certain topic or event, and generic framing, applicable to multiple topics (e.g., 'conflict frame') (de Vreese,

2005). Issue-specific frames are said to have the disadvantage of not being generalizable, thus offering little added value to theory building. Brüggeman and D'Angelo (2018) argue to not see these as competitive and opposing ways of framing research, but rather as complimentary. Moreover, the lacking of assigning power to frames compared to for example critical discourse analysis could be considered a disadvantage. Compared to critical discourse analysis, which has a normative component and is value-driven (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000) framing analysis places the reconstructed perspectives on an equal balance next to each other. In a first step, no judgement is made on the value of any of the perspectives, keeping an open mind and possibility to converse with all stakeholders. The reconstructed frames in this dissertation are considered 'culturally embedded frames' as explained by Van Gorp (2010), which resonate with the receivers' culture. An important addition to previous framing literature is the explicit focus on deproblematizing counter-frames. The performed research has added insights on dominant perspectives with alternative views on contested concepts. By uncovering these perspectives, the focus is not only on dominant views, but also on potential alternative options. For example in the case of radicalisation, no less than eight deproblematizing counter-frames were reconstructed. As such, a constructive contribution is made to the ongoing debate. As discussed earlier in this dissertation, all (counter-)frames are critically examined, discussing linkages with the framing of other issues or potential connotations of each frame. It remains, however, upon the audience to balance all arguments and decide which frames are best suited in the communication context of the stakeholder, as discussed in Chapter 6.

Scholars have argued that radicalisation should be understood as an empty (Fadil et al., 2019) or floating signifier (Schultz et al., 2020), lacking a clear definition and open to personal interpretation (Laclau, 2005; Mehlman, 1972; Moraes, 2014). There is a discrepancy between what people refer to and what is known, with an overuse of the term (Mehlman, 1972). Reflecting on the categorisation of empty and floating signifiers (Laclau, 2005), radicalisation is considered here as a floating signifier. An empty signifier would imply that the concept incorporates so many meanings that it means nothing anymore, while at the same time it becomes all-explanatory. However, in society, the concept of radicalisation has such impact that it would be impossible to say that it is *nothing.* Framing helps grasp the dynamics of the floating signifier: with changing context, the meaning of the concept alternates. For example, throughout history different movements have been labelled radical at their time, such as the feminist movement calling for women votes, which is now seen as democratic change. Framing and counter-framing facilitates the understanding of these fluctuating interpretations and

uncovers the different contexts. It is through these interpretations that the construction of reality takes place.

Due to the ambiguity of the term, it is argued to abandon the word altogether (Sedgwick, 2010). If anything, Chapter 3, relying on framing and presenting an overview of the different understandings of radicalisation, has acknowledged the scope of interpretations, counteracting the explanatory value of the concept. Avoiding the term is challenging due to its omnipresence in societal and academic debate. The presented framing research, and as such, framing analysis in general, is a contribution to overcoming this hurdle. As radicalisation is a social construct, insight in the frames and counter-frames used in society help to disentangle stakeholders' perspectives and identifying framing methods. The reasoning behind each (counter-)frame facilitates understanding of out-group's concerns, arguments and doubts. Specifically concerning highly ambiguous concepts such as radicalisation, framing research has explanatory value. Compared to concepts such as climate, there is common ground on what climate is. There are then different ways to perceive it, and different solutions when a problem is posed. However, when dealing with potential floating signifiers, framing facilitates letting go of the search for a common ground or consensus definition, and in contrast creates room for interaction based on diverging perspectives. Through framing analysis, it becomes clear that what is believed to be radicalisation is a social construct and a single interpretation of many possibilities. As Chandler (2013) puts it, the deconstruction of representations permits to see which realities are portrayed. The concept still incorporates multiple perspectives, however, when these are clarified and disentangled, there lies opportunity in debating these viewpoints rather than having a dialogue of the deaf.

The essence of framing is to select aspects of reality and make them more salient (Entman, 1993). In a framing process, this is the first step: to select and construct. The combination of elements of reality are woven together in a coherent story. From a presupposed frame, aspects of reality are conceived that confirm the frame. This dissertation has clarified this pattern when it comes to radicalisation. For example, when a journalist is assigned to write a story on radicalisation, the existing frame will influence the following steps. The journalist can decide to go to Molenbeek, and focus on local mosques, or protests, or youth work. All these decisions are influenced by how radicalisation is perceived by the journalist and editors. The final article will reflect this view on radicalisation, as it highlights for example an area in Belgium or religion, or rebellious youth, and link these aspects together. The second step is a self-fulfilling mechanism, in which reality adjusts itself to a presented frame. Behaviour is in

line with how reality is perceived, for example, when radicalisation is interpreted as contagious, policy has translated into Deradex, isolating structures for so-called radicalised imprisoned individuals. Another example is the interpretation of radicalisation as a 'Muslim-problem' from which deradicalisation programs focusing on the Muslim community arose. Especially in such contexts with much ambiguity, these interactions between representations and reality create a dominant symbolic reality. The concept of radicalisation is then issued to gain grip on an unknown situation, contributing to the creation of that situation.

This process of the social construction of reality can also be recognized when it comes to race. Stuart Hall (1997) already identified the concept as a floating signifier. Through a racial frame, race categorises people. People make linkages between race, intellect, economic background, religion and many other facets of identity. Race then becomes a predetermining factor for these different elements, without any logic or evidence supporting this reasoning. It is only through this social interaction that race is defined: as it is only in relation to white that black gains meaning, referring to a power relation rather than a biological fact (Fanon, 1963). Perceiving reality from this perspective, the racialization of people, impacts behaviour, resulting in the social construction of reality with a categorisation of people based on race, evidenced in discrimination for example on the housing and job market.

7.2.3 Lessons learned

As the essence of research is to continue learning, a few processes during the PhD require extra reflection at the end of the PhD trajectory. In this subsection, considerations on methodological choices as well as the role of academia in potentially contributing to othering will be discussed.

Methodological reflections

Every research project depends upon methodological choices. When it comes to working with sensitive topics, as in this dissertation, there were some methodological struggles, not only with choosing the suitable approach but also with finding participants willing to discuss radicalisation during the years of heightened tension, fear and growing (de)radicalisation programs. Out of ethical considerations, it was a given to be transparent about the research topic, which led to a great deal of distrust and counter reactions. Research on working with sensitive topics has highlighted three main building blocks: building trust (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007), create safe spaces (Adeloye et al., 2019) and be aware of potential emotional distress for researcher (Lee, 1993) and participant (Decker et al., 2011). During the course of this dissertation, these were taken into account. However, it was only through a combination of

persistence and the willingness to think creatively about methods that opportunities arose to continue the research. Letting go of known methodologies, and looking for ways that feel comfortable for both researcher and participant is an important methodological lesson taken from this doctorate. Cartoon-elicitation, as developed and applied in this research, created room for connection. As discussed in Chapter 6, alternative approaches could include working through co-creation or action research with participants.

Academic reflections

Academia do not form a neutral actor in society. It is often presented as objective and unbiased; however, as researchers are human, they too carry their personal bias into the workplace. Many academics are aware of this tendency and consciously work on learning about blind spots, an ever continuing process. This section focuses on the made choices from this perspective.

Participant selection

As addressed by Ahmed and Matthes (2017), as well as by Poole (2002), research on Islam can reinforce an Orientalist perspective through the focus on issues such as terrorism and migration. Knowledge is related to power, in which studying is related to judging (Said, 1979). The role of academia in critically examining stigmatising processes while not falling into the systematic trap of the ethnicization of research forms an important consideration in the current research. Besides the need for funding which might push research designs in a dominant, fashionable framework, critical research aiming to question dominant narratives can reinforce stigma through the development of research questions or participant selection. In the case of this dissertation, for example, it could be questioned whether discussing radicalisation with the so-called suspect community is not reinforcing the link made between the participants and radicalisation, and strengthening the perception of this community as suspect. The research choice was made to learn more about experiences of a targeted group with stigmatising discourse, however, within a societal security perspective on these perspectives, such potential consequences need to be acknowledged.

When it comes to the framing analysis of radicalisation, it was consciously chosen not to focus on ‘Muslim-radicalisation’ but to see how the concept is defined beyond the borders of this securitised discourse. This has led to a broad overview of viewpoints, albeit it also shows how the initial starting points are crucial for the continuation of the research. However, Fadil and de Koning (2019) have pointed to the fact that efforts by social scientists to purify the term radicalisation (broadening the interpretation outside Muslim-radicalisation) do not lessen the

ambiguity of the term nor avoid it being used with a focus on the Muslim community. How well intended these efforts thus might be, it is the question which societal effects they have.

By having a panel with people from different disciplines and backgrounds, but also regular discussions in the workplace – thus not operating in a vacuum – it is possible to become aware of implicit bias in research choices and have attention for personal positionality, learning about "how we know what we know" (Takacs, 2003, p. 28). For example, discussions on research on radicalisation with the different partners brought insights on how academia is perceived by the young people involved in the project, and potential issues with traditional methods (e.g., signing informed consent forms) as well as on the experiences with 'radicalisation' in policy, media and research. This mutual learning of positions helped to approach this research in a more substantiated way. Such panels and consultation moments are helpful, although depend highly on who has a seat at the table.

Positionality

As mentioned in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, my personal experience affects how I have perceived the PhD experience on the topics of migration, radicalisation and securitised discourses. I have an outspoken nature and have struggled with balancing personal and academic insights in this dissertation. I am mindful that our future children, if it is given to us, will be labelled 'migrant-children' and face structural discrimination and racism solely based upon the colour of their skin and the name we will proudly give them. This reality, combined with the multiple encounters with racist discourse throughout the years of researching migration and radicalisation, has challenged my relation to this research. Besides the emotional burden, which I could not face without my supportive colleagues and friends, it left me questioning whether academic research was what I should be focusing on and if yes, how it could contribute to societal change.

In academia, focus is on objectivity and neutrality, where it is repeatedly emphasised that personal reflections can influence the credibility of your work. This focus can contribute to an academic spiral of silence, where the fear of an activist-label silences critical voices. Having strong conflictions about how to balance these factors, which contradicts my opinionated persona, I have aspired to write a solid, substantiated dissertation that offers academic and societal insights, fuelling reflection on how imagined out-groups are treated and how that affects both 'us and them'. It could be said that by not taking a stance, research confirms the status quo and is thus supportive of a dominant framework of structural exclusion

and racism, hence my ever continuing doubt: what is the right thing to do? I am hopeful that by emphasizing the results, and most importantly the experiences of the participants, this status quo is disputed. Although there are reasons to question the participant selection, working with the so-called suspect community in a radicalisation context, I believe in the value of emphasizing their voice and confronting the powerful majority with the consequences of discourse. Indeed, I am personally invested in this research, but I also believe that it should not matter what the colour of my, my partner's or potential future children's skin is. A racist framework of othering affects all, and it will take all to counter it. I can only hope that this scientific work, through its helicopter perspective, ignites a want to do so.

7.3 Limitations

As time, resources and human energy are limited, every project is based on choices and thus limitations. When it comes to the presented dissertation, the main limitation might also be the main strength. As noted, this research is primarily based upon short-term externally funded projects. This implies that there was no clear trajectory from the start of the PhD, no clear research questions and thus studies that were built to answer them. As the projects followed upon each other, it has been a struggle to see a clear coherent story that connects the dots. A standard PhD path might provide more grip, as there is a predetermined goal to reach. However, the approach of this PhD has also created the possibility to learn along the way and does not have the limitation of a premeditated plan: insights from one project fuelled the next, gaining knowledge over the years of connecting the dots. Working with multiple research partners in Belgium and The Netherlands, multiple perspectives were brought to the table (governmental, non-governmental, different academic disciplines). Added with the insights from the participants, all actors have directly and indirectly contributed to this result. This dissertation is the outcome of social interaction, of ideas and insights that sometimes clashed yet in the end moved the research(er) forward.

A second limitation concerns Chapter 4, namely the study on cartoon elicitation. The study built not only upon a case study of discussing radicalisation, but brings in insights from related studies on euthanasia, or migration. However, a limitation of this analysis is the lack of comparison to non-elicited conversations. The conversations were partly elicited and partly non-elicited, nonetheless, the discussion of the dominant (counter-)frames were always cartoon-elicited. In hindsight, setting up a comparative design might have enhanced the understanding of the use of cartoons. Nevertheless, considering the countless efforts for

approaching and including participants, doubling the number of partakers deems a substantial hurdle. Another possibility would be to enlarge the group with non-members of the 'suspect community', minimizing the comparative value.

A third limitation is to be found in the second study, Chapter 3, analysing the frames and counter-frames in the radicalisation debate in Belgium. Due to limited (time and financial) resources at the time, no deductive analysis was performed. Thus, there are only indications of the presence of the reconstructed perspectives. Based on the inductive analysis, there is a sense of which frames are dominant and which are not, however, a deductive analysis would have been of added value. This would mean more substantial knowledge on the prevalence of (counter-)frames on radicalisation in Belgium. Interesting would be to compare different media outlets, comparable to Chapter 2, and extend the comparison to multiple countries and cultures.

7.4 Future research

As this dissertation has added to the literature on the framing of migration and radicalisation, the experiences of targeted communities, methodological insights when dealing with sensitive topics and response strategies to polarising issues, the conclusions and reflections also give way for potential future research.

Firstly, Chapter 5 discussed *dual distancing* as a response by the suspect community to the dominant framing of radicalisation. Previous research on experiences of minoritized groups with media representation (e.g., d'Haenens et al., 2000; Vyncke, 2020) illustrates a refuting (ergo, distancing) of dominant and stigmatising discourses. However, reflecting upon the experience of a focus group conversation with newcomers (as validation for Chapter 2), preliminary indications of dual distancing might be present – the distancing towards a stigmatising language, and towards new newcomers arriving. This builds upon a feeling of 'close the borders, and take better care of who is here already'. Continued research on the process of dual distancing in this and other minoritized contexts can give more insight in how this process takes shape and what the inclusion and exclusion criteria are.

Secondly, and building upon the first point, the impact of labelling discourse on migrants and refugees is another potential research focus. Looking at how the ambiguity of how long a person remains a refugee, or a migrant, or the children (continuing to even "fourth-generation migrants" in Belgium) impacts identity building and integration might also shed light on how a country struggles to integrate to newcomers.

Thirdly, multiple chapters (Chapter 2, 5 and 6) have touched upon the (lack of) inclusion of voice or 'voicing the voiceless', equally in media as in research. Admirable initiatives spark to counter such mechanisms; however, these are rarely durable nor reaching beyond the already convinced. A focus on overcoming the hurdles to inclusion can enhance the understanding and bettering of these mechanisms.

Fourthly, Chapter 4 described in detail the use of the cartoon-elicitation method, building upon photo-elicitation with the particular case study of discussing radicalisation with the 'suspect community'. Future research could further explore this methodology focusing on different sensitive topics such as sexual assault. This would pose its own challenges, with difficulties to represent, for example, incest. However, the method might be a tool to leave the control in hands of the participant, to either discuss personal experiences or talk on a more abstract level. Mainly in the context of polarising issues, the method can stimulate exploring alternative viewpoints and personal biases. Moreover, the exploration of alternative creative methodologies in a sensitive context deserves more attention. The use of drawings, videos, role-play or other perceived unconventional methods might give room for potentially valuable insights.

In addition to testing cartoon elicitation with different sensitive topics, there is the question whether the method can be used to counter alienation. For example in a context of imprisoned 'radicalised' individuals, or applied by youth workers, there might be a preventive aspect in having open conversations on perspectives in society and how to deal with them. A collaboration with, for example, youth workers can result in an evaluation of the de-alienation possibilities of cartoon-elicited conversations.

Fifthly, Chapter 5 indicates the internalisation of stigmatising discourse. This might be connected to a form of self-stigma, when outsider's stigmatization influences individuals socially and psychologically (Bos et al., 2013). When dealing with stigmatising media content, Vyncke (2020) categorised four coping mechanisms: media avoidance, refuting and reframing statements, undermining the source and diminishing the intent to stigmatise. Continued research could look further into the application of such strategies within the suspect community. Based on the presented research, in which the participants indicated a belief of intentional stigma and a focus on refuting the stigmatising statements, a hypothesis would be that the applied coping mechanisms are mainly media avoidance and refuting or reframing statements.

Sixthly, Chapter 6 presented an overview of potential response strategies to polarising issues added with a practical guide. One strategy is topic avoidance, which can relate to a *spiral of silence*: people remaining silent out of fear of isolation. Online networks and the possibility to remain anonymous deems to be connected to online hate speech. However, future research on the potential of remaining anonymous and breaking the spiral of silence can give insight in the potential conflict between engaging in the discussion and a fear of isolation. Thus, the hypothesis is that anonymity in an online environment is beneficial in breaking the spiral of silence as it can eliminate the fear of isolation.

Lastly, this dissertation is built upon research in Belgium. The datasets studied in Chapter 2 and 3 are Belgian samples, although the frame matrices are approached in a generic way including shared values. The cartoon elicitation method transcends borders, as it can be applied to different sensitive topics. However, comparing studies between countries could uncover country-specific interpretations, sensitivities or experiences.

This dissertation has furthered the knowledge on the experience with the socially constructed reality of migration and radicalisation, with academic and societal relevance. It has reflected upon the extent to which othering not only affects an imagined out-group but also on how it relates to the construction of the self and the perceived reality. May this dissertation be a step towards the eradication of *Stranger Danger*, and the construction of a truly inclusive society.

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Appendix A

Frame matrix for migration

Table 2 (Counter-)Frame packages that define migration and refugees in the Flemish societal debate.

Frame	Cultural theme	Definition of migration and refugees	Cause (why is it a problem?)	Moral values involved	Possible solutions/actions	Metaphors, choice of vocabulary
1 Clash of civilisations	Cultural and religious identity as source of conflict	Muslims' norms and values are averse to those of Western guest countries	A barbaric, Islamic identity clashes with the enlightened Western ideals	Pride, incompatibility of two dominant elements	Assimilation is demanded, if not, newcomers need to leave	Islamic occupation, barbaric values, threatening our culture
2 The hostile intruder	A dangerous stranger invading	Potential incoming criminals pose a threat to society	Terrorist attacks and criminality numbers rise with migration	Security	Lock Fortress Europe, the security of own people is priority	War against migration, importing jihadis, migration equals criminality
3 Taking back control	The need to control external factors	The uncontrolled, chaotic influx in an overloaded country	A lack of efficient international cooperation and regulation	Autonomy, self-determination	Equal divide of burdens across borders	Refugeetsunami, migration management, flood
4 Taking back the money	Accounting calculations in an economic logic	Real vulnerable people are ignored to please good-for-nothings	Unconditional financial and policy support for migrants and refugees	Justice	Expect self-maintenance and contributions to society of newcomers	Price of migration, profiteers, incompatible with social security
5 The innocent victim	Someone has been through a traumatic experience outside their will	Migrants and refugees are people in need	Physical, political or economic threats force fleeing	Mercy	Unconditional solidarity with people in need	Terrified, surviving, helpless, hurt
6 Win-win	All parties have advantage with a situation	Migration is a solution for issues on the job market as an opportunity for newcomers	New human resources fulfilling personal and societal needs	Pragmatism	Organise an efficient play of supply and demand	Win-win for everyone, supporting the economy
7 Panta Rhei	Eternal, constant change	Migration is a natural given, people have always and will always move	No cohabitation form is definitive, the flexibility of society	Equilibrium	Accepting changes, being open to transformation	Natural given, everyone is a child of migrants
8 The welfare gap	The gap between rich and poor	An unequal global divide forces people to migrate to better places	Exploitation of the South by the West leads to poverty and migration	Justice	A structural solution to the unequal divide, honest pay for honest work	Economic development in home countries

Appendix B

Frame matrix for radicalisation

Table 3 (Counter-)Frame packages that define radicalisation in the Belgian societal debate.

Frame	Cultural theme	Definition of radicalisation	Cause (why is it a problem?)	Consequences	Moral values involved	Possible solutions/actions	Link with extremism and terrorism	Metaphors, choice of vocabulary
1 Criminal career	From petty thief to gangster	Step-by-step one shows more criminal behaviour and thus becomes more radical	Fast money or time in prison turns young thieves into the ultimate criminal	Gangsters are collecting fame and status while creating a dangerous society	People consciously choose for evil	The police and justice department have to track down potential criminals and lock them up	Radicalism grows into extremism and ultimately terrorism	Terrorist elite school, training centre for jihad's, prison as university of radicalisation
2 Virus	A life-threatening, contagious disease	Radicalisation is an evil, spreading ideology	Poisonous radical ideas are transmitted to vulnerable individuals	The society panics and activates disaster plans	The battle against evil and the victory of the right	The government needs to isolate and try to cure contaminated individuals	Radicalisation without treatment leads to violence	Positive medicines, feverish behaviour, antivirusprogram, deradicalisation clinic
3 Mutiny	Resistance against the authorities	Radicalisation is the sudden uproar against the authorities	Perceived discrimination and injustice lead to build up frustrations	There is insubordination in society and a disruption of the balance	Peace is disturbed and should be restored	The priority is to restore political stability: address frustrations or suppress the uproar	Some insurgents take up the arms	Intifada, distrust the government, resentment against the white elite
4 Clash of civilisations	Cultural and religious identity as source of conflict	Continuous challenges by 'the other' leads to aggressive behaviour	Two macho cultures clash and feed the anger in each other	Society polarises and segregates, everyone is forced to choose sides	The incompatibility of two dominant elements	One of the two cultures needs to win to restore peace and stability	A minority takes up arms to win the battle	Kulturkampf, clash of civilisations, superiority, being repressed in my own city
5 Puberty	The phase of becoming an adult	Radicalisation is actually a phase of identity searching	A psychological phase leads to experimenting with extreme ideologies	Young people are testing boundaries and provoking on purpose	It is a part of life and a part of growing up	Society needs to stop dramatizing and see the natural process for what it is	In exceptional cases, the young people remain on the extreme path	Wandering young people, brats, sleeper, typical for their age, do not overreact
6 Meaningfulness	Giving purpose to life	Radicalisation is actually an intense experience of ideology in a rational world	The fading of religion in the West creates a need for alternatives	Someone chooses to try and live their ideology or religion to the fullest	People have a need for spirituality	People have the right to believe and society needs to accept this fact	This severe lifestyle is aimed at inner experience and not violence	A pure living of religion, trying to lead a good life, Amish, Jehovah's, vegans, all radical

Frame	Cultural theme	Definition of radicalisation	Cause	Consequences	Moral values involved	Possible solutions/actions	Link with extremism and terrorism	Metaphors, choice of vocabulary
7 Penance	Righting wrongs made in the past	Radicalisation is a rebirth, a way to find forgiveness	Missteps fulfil the sinner with guilt and the urge to right these wrongs	A clear black and white interpretation shows the way to living a good life	The importance of taking responsibility and acknowledging mistakes	It is up to the sinner to give the best of himself in order to obtain forgiveness	The ultimate way to be forgiven by God is to die in His name	My sins will be forgiven, one act can erase all sins, martyrdom
8 The freedom fighter	Fighting for the freedom of a country or a people	Radicalisation is a sign of courage since someone dares to stand up for the weak	The worldwide geopolitical injustice forces someone to activism	A hero rises that battles for the good cause	Always pursue the good	A strong signal of the international community to help the oppressed and weak	Terrorism is actually a battle for freedom	Shortcut to heroism, idealists, stand up for your rights
9 Resilience	The ability to retake the former shape after being stretched	Radicalisation is the sudden outburst of built-up tension in society and individual	The rapid, far-reaching changes pressure society and people	The society and the individual look for a new balance	The belief in the flexibility of society	Stimulating mutual rapprochement and flexibility support the search for balance	The high tensions can give a sudden outburst to violence	We need to be stretchable and resilient, one of the most flexible communities
10 An open mind	To be approachable for the unknown	Radicalisation is no longer a threat when one realizes that the evil is only in the mind	Negative thoughts and emotions feed the gap between people	Being open to the unknown vanishes fear from society	Yin and Yang	People should learn that everyone acts out of the idea of 'doing good'	Evil can also be terrorism, but that as well is part of reality	They are part of us, need to step towards them, they are always reachable
11 Diversity	Many different ideas or opinions about something	Radicalisation is actually a small part of a variety of ideological interpretations	The extreme ends demand and receive too much attention	Society confuses an ideology or religion with one particular interpretation	More attention should be given to personal interpretations	Other perspectives should dare to demand attention, people should keep an open mind	Violence occurs only very limited in the extreme interpretations	A religious conviction like any other, extreme interpretation of Islam
12 A catalyst	An element that accelerates or starts a process	Radical ideas are fundamentally different than the mainstream view on society	Challenging thoughts thrive a democracy	An in depth discussion on society challenges the current regime	The necessity of contradiction	A democracy needs to give space to radical thoughts to keep the debate alive	If there is no room for debate, violent outliers are possible	Constructively radical, plea for radicalisation, radical enlightenment

Appendix C

Cartoons representing (counter-)frames on radicalisation

Figure 10 Cartoon representing the Criminal career frame

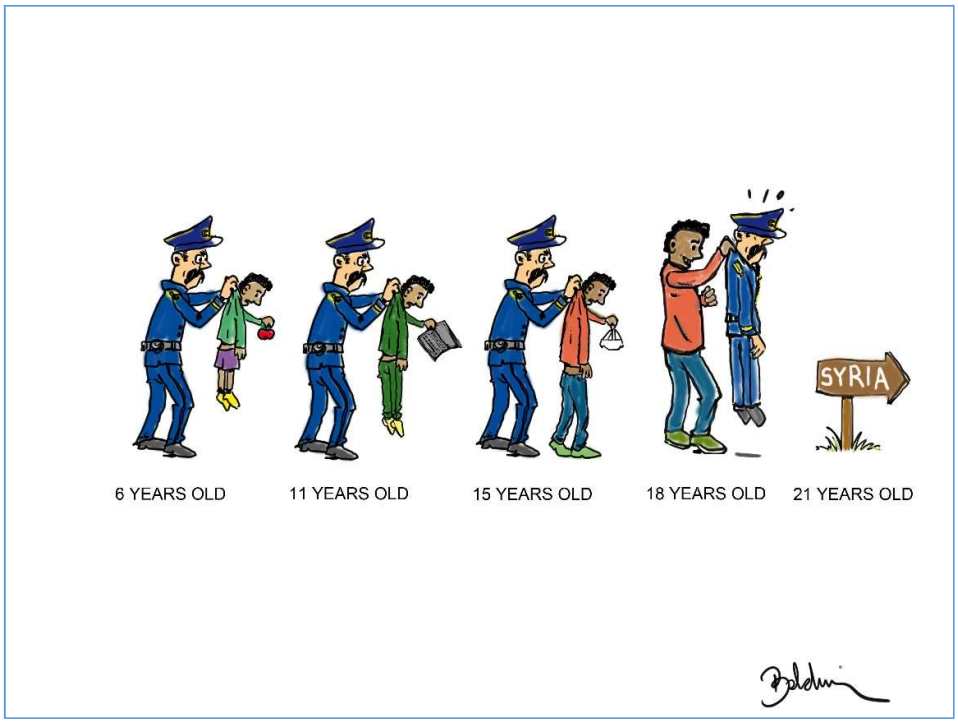


Figure 11 Cartoon representing the Virus frame

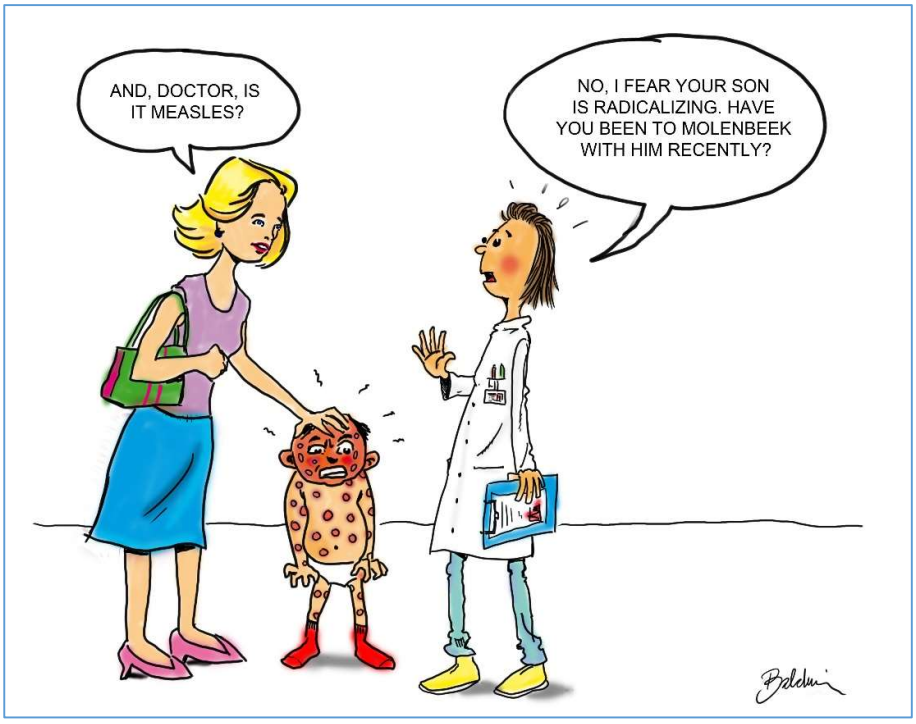


Figure 12 Cartoon representing the Mutiny frame



Figure 13 Cartoon representing the Clash of civilizations frame



Figure 14 Cartoon representing the Puberty counter-frame

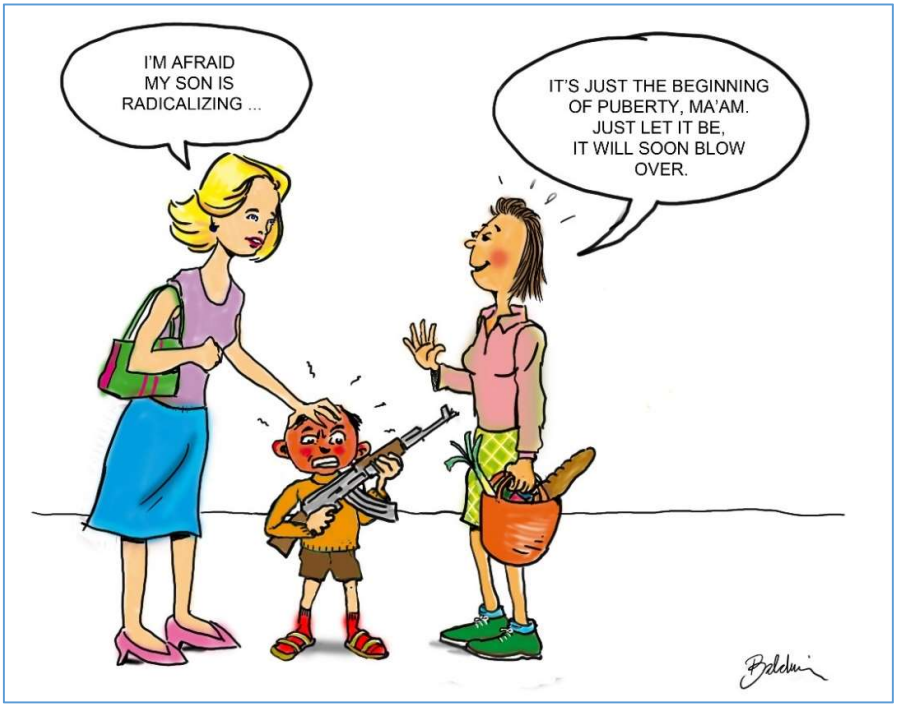


Figure 15 Cartoon representing the Meaningfulness counter-frame

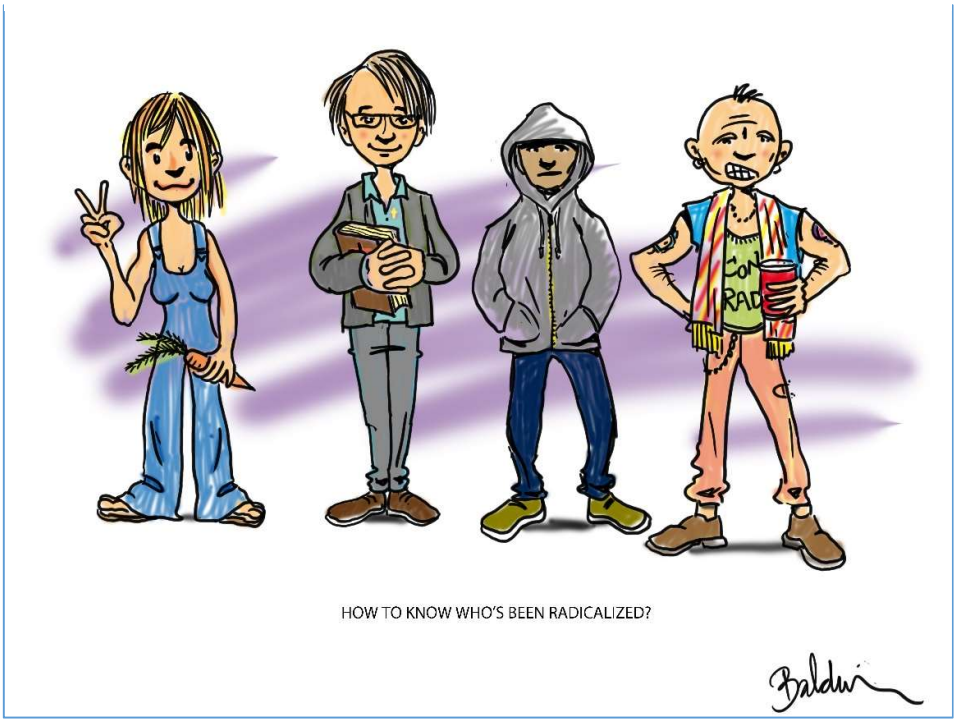


Figure 16 Cartoon representing the Penance counter-frame

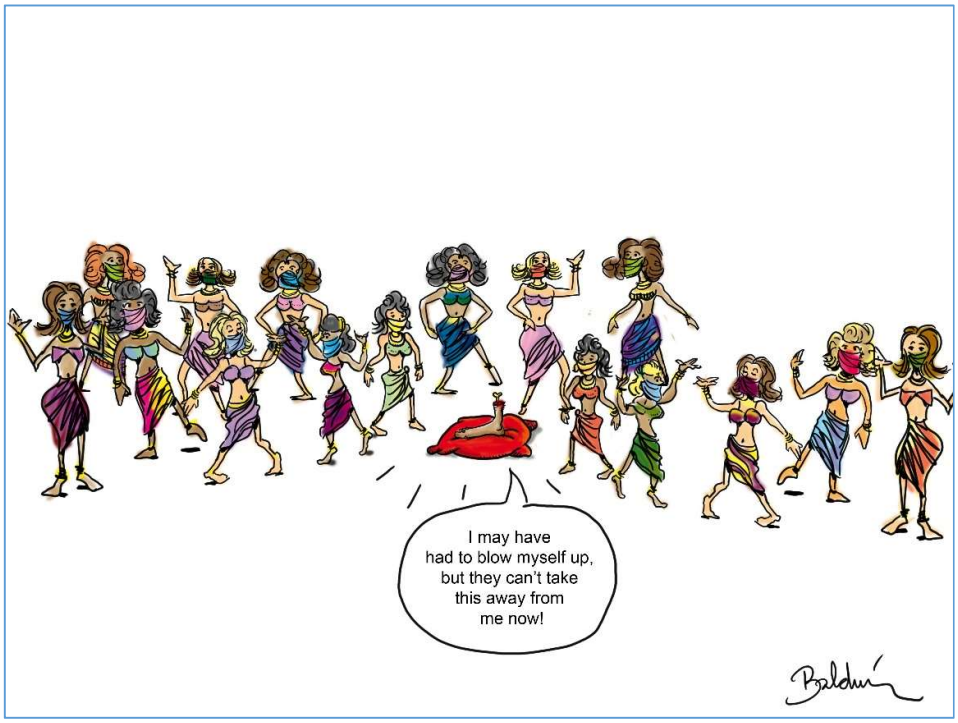


Figure 17 Cartoon representing the Freedom fighter counter-frame

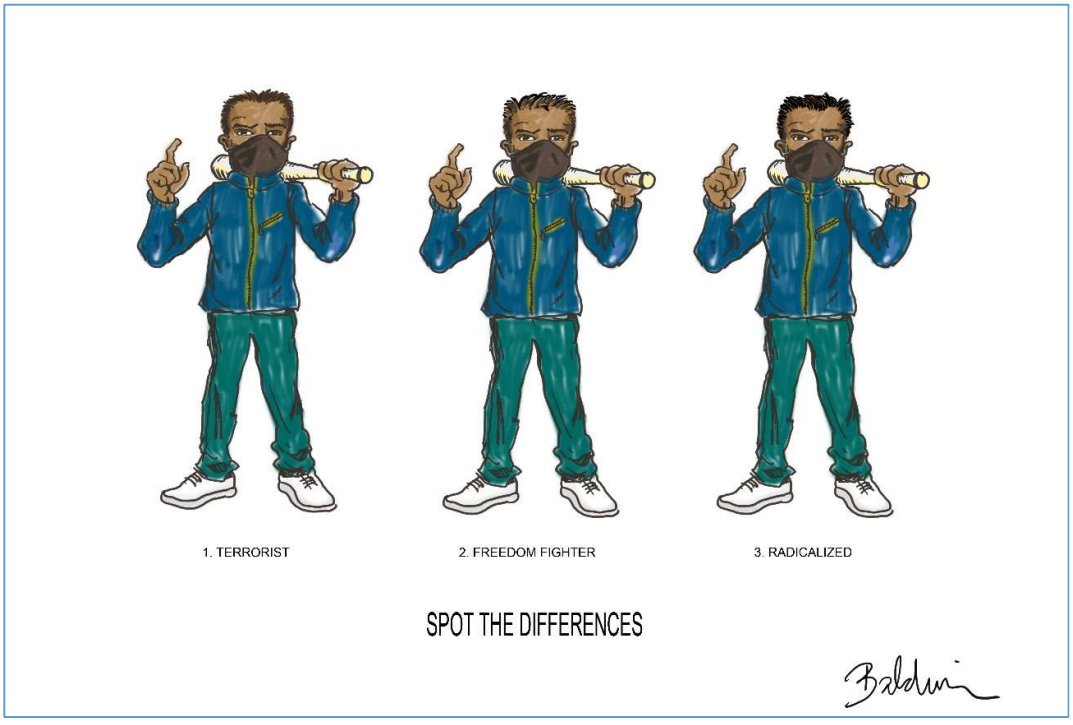


Figure 18 Cartoon representing the Resilience counter-frame

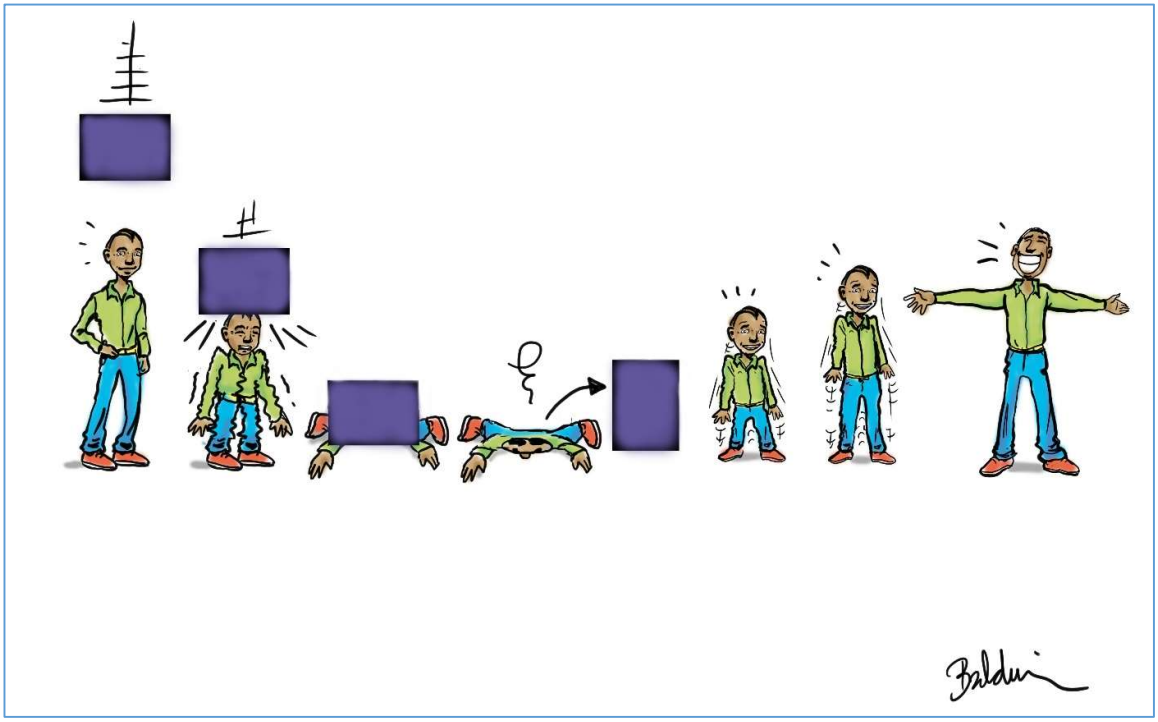


Figure 19 Cartoon representing the An open mind counter-frame

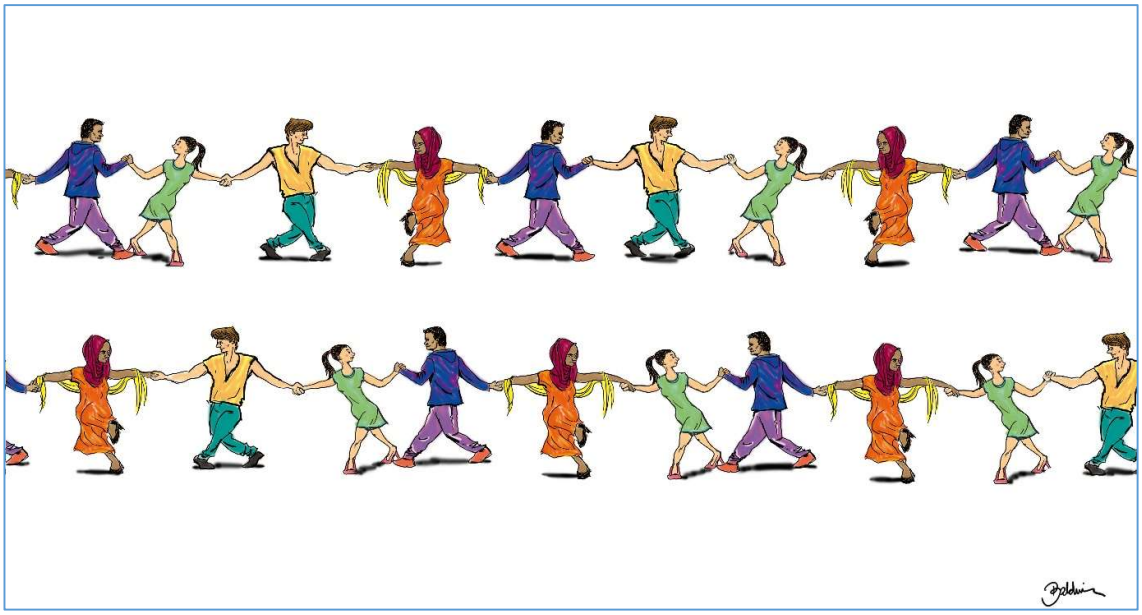


Figure 20 Cartoon representing the Diversity counter-frame

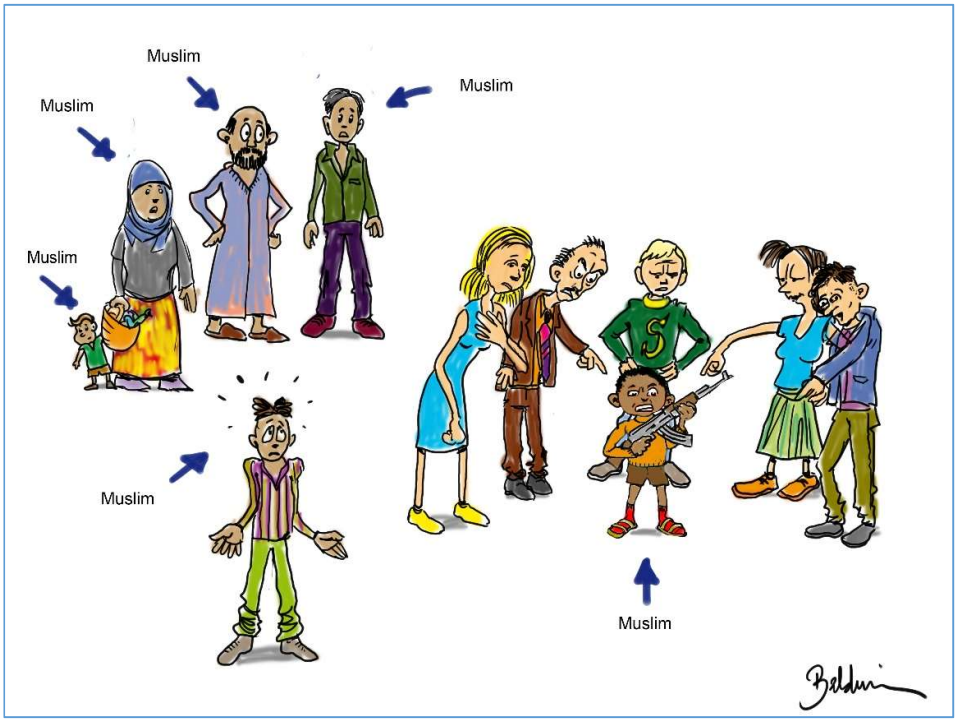
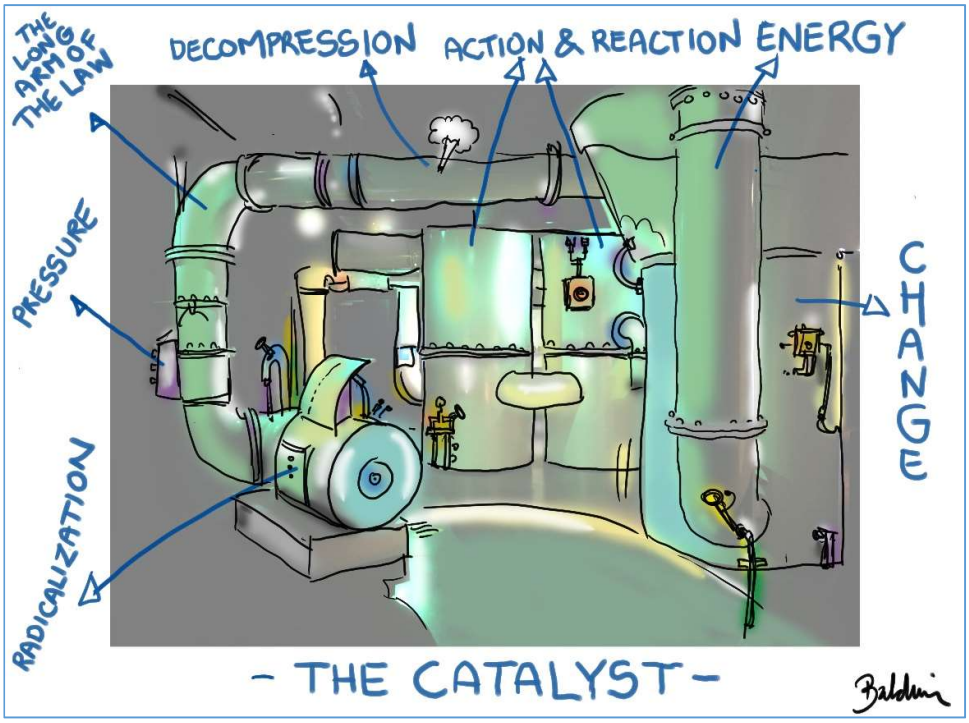


Figure 21 Cartoon representing the Catalyst counter-frame



Nederlandse samenvatting

Stranger Danger, de perceptie van de onbekende ander als gevaarlijk, draagt in een polariserende samenleving bij tot de constructie van *in-groups* versus *out-groups*. Jarenlang is de belangrijkste ander in het Westen 'de moslim' geweest. De framing van die ander als slachtoffer of indringer via wijdverspreide mediaboodschappen beïnvloedt hoe het publiek naar minderheden kijkt, wat resulteert in een sociaal geconstrueerde werkelijkheid. Narratieven over de islam en moslims zijn overwegend negatief en stereotiep. In de nasleep van een meedogenloze *War-on-Terror* manifesteert die zogenoemde *othering* zich in de aanpak van de gevoelige onderwerpen migratie en radicalisering, de focus van deze dissertatie. Een op veiligheid gericht discours werkt angst in de hand en stelt minderheidsgroepen voor als verdachte gemeenschappen *(suspect communities).* Burgers worden dan als gevaarlijk beschouwd op basis van hun veronderstelde religie, migratieachtergrond, kleding of andere factoren. Na een overzicht van de literatuur over de bovengenoemde thema's, gaat dit proefschrift in op de vier resulterende onderzoeksvragen in een Belgische context. Ten eerste, het blootleggen van de frames en counter-frames over migratie en radicalisering die verdergaan dan een polariserende slachtoffer versus indringer dichotomie. Ten tweede, nagaan hoe leden van de *suspect community* de dominante framing ervaren. Ten derde, het ontwikkelen van een geschikte methodologie om onderzoek naar gelijkaardige gevoelige onderwerpen te vergemakkelijken. Ten vierde, theoretische kennis vertalen naar een praktisch instrument om te reageren op polariserende kwesties. Het hieruit voortvloeiende proefschrift is verdeeld in drie delen: inhoud, perceptie en toepasbaarheid.

Het eerste deel over inhoud bouwt voort op een framinganalyse om de mogelijke (counter-)frames rond migratie en radicalisering in België te reconstrueren. In hoofdstuk 2 wordt de framing van migratie in de Belgische pers uiteengezet, waarbij de mogelijkheden worden geschetst om verder te kijken dan een beperkende *Slachtoffer* versus *Indringer* dichotomie, die bovendien polarisering in de hand werkt. De studies in dit hoofdstuk koppelen de framing van migratie aan belangrijke gebeurtenissen in de migratie-terrorisme-nexus, wat de dynamische interactie aantoont tussen de realiteit en de gepercipieerde realiteit. Hoofdstuk 3 geeft een overzicht van de (counter-)frames die verband houden met radicalisering, met aandacht voor

alternatieve perspectieven (d.w.z. counter-frames) die niet aan bod komen in het publieke debat.

Deel II over perceptie bestaat uit twee elkaar versterkende hoofdstukken die focussen op de perceptie en ervaring van leden van de *suspect community* met het dominante discours over radicalisering. Hoofdstuk 4 reflecteert over de zoektocht naar een geschikte methodologie om onderzoek naar gevoelige onderwerpen te faciliteren en evalueert uitgebreid deze methodologie (i.e., cartoon-elicitatie). Hoofdstuk 5 presenteert de analyse van gesprekken met leden van de *suspect community* aan de hand van cartoon-elicitatie. De focus van dit hoofdstuk is tweeledig: (1) de aanwezigheid van de 'wij en zij' dynamiek binnen de verdachte gemeenschap bespreken en (2) hun ervaring met dominante framing van radicalisering nagaan.

In deel III over toepasbaarheid wordt een model voorgesteld van vecht-, vlucht- en versmeltingsbenaderingen om responsstrategieën op polariserende kwesties te omvatten. Voortbouwend op theoretische inzichten uit de vorige hoofdstukken en aanvullende studies, bevat hoofdstuk 6 een vertaling van de theorie naar de praktijk, waarbij het doel van de belanghebbenden, namelijk vechten (d.w.z. een debat aanwakkeren), vluchten (d.w.z. een debat ontwijken) of versmelten (d.w.z. een debat depolariseren) de communicatie over polariserende kwesties aanstuurt.

Deze dissertatie concludeert dat narratieven over migratie en radicalisering *Stranger Danger* weerspiegelen. De interactie van dergelijke geframede narratieven met de percepties van het publiek resulteert in een sociaal geconstrueerde werkelijkheid van 'migranten' en 'geradicaliseerde' individuen. Leden van de *suspect community* getuigen van de schadelijke gevolgen van het problematiseren van radicalisering. Bovendien heerst er binnen de gemeenschap zelf een dynamiek van *dual distancing*, de voortzetting van ons-versus-hen-narratieven, en verschijnen er tekenen van internalisering van het stigmatiserende discours. De bestrijding van *Stranger Danger* en het werken aan een werkelijk inclusieve, gedepolariseerde samenleving is in het belang van allen.

Doctoraten in de Sociale Wetenschappen en Sociale en Culturele Antropologie

http://soc.kuleuven.be/fsw/doctoralprogramme/ourdoctors